

T H E
CHOSEN
PEOPLE

A SHORT
HISTORY
OF THE
JEWS IN
EUROPE

JEROME
AND
JEAN
PHARABOD

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✓ 353625 ✓

THARAUD

Chosen people

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view Israel as a race for
they are a common unity

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE





THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

A Short History of the Jews in Europe

BY

JEROME AND JEAN THARAUD

TRANSLATED BY

FRANCES WILSON HUARD

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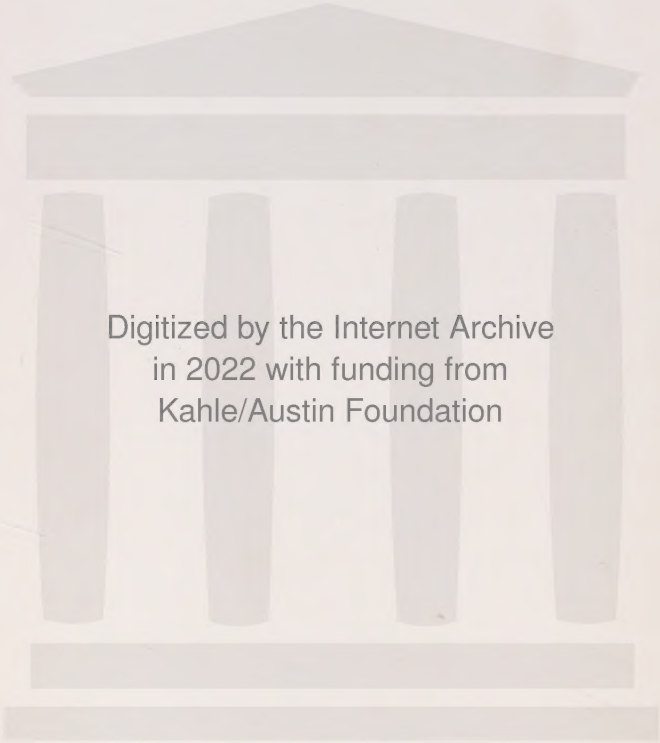
THARAUD
THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

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FOREWORD

IN THIS brief account of the Jews, we shall not attempt the whole prodigious story which might be told—a story of wanderings which commence the day when Abraham and his tribe leave the valley of the Euphrates, and which still continue before us, always varied, always the same.

Aided by books and by sights that we recall of Oriental Europe and of Palestine, we would like to recount what circumstances led Moses's people to accept that strange existence of the ghetto; what tragedies were enacted in those relegated quarters, those tiny Jewish communities, which all have struggled almost equally—in Spain and Holland, France, Germany and Po-

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land. But first of all, let our attitude be quite clear as we approach our subject.

Every one knows those jests, "galejades," as they call them in the South of France (and the Jews, even those of the North, are all meridionals), in which Israel makes keen ironical fun of itself. Its endless facetiousness, moving through the ages, softens gradually. But we had a Jewish friend who said he could travel from Paris to Marseilles and constantly tell jokes anything but kind to Jacob and Sarah. Israel certainly does not flatter itself. Yet these people, so quick to jeer at their own faults or even at their own absurdity, are incredibly touchy as soon as an outsider meddles with their affairs. They are naturally mistrustful, which of course is easy to comprehend in the light of their centuries of misfortune.

We have often received letters from Russian or Polish Jews not known to us. They are as-

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tonished to find in our books so many details of their everyday life and were anxious to learn if we belonged to the Chosen People.

Often, too, less amiable readers, who themselves have never known the life of the ghetto, bitterly accuse us of being prejudiced and anti-Semitic. They consider our stories and studies to be gross caricatures, and they reproach us with exposing publicly a life which reflects unpleasantly upon them. It irks them that we tarry complacently in describing an existence which to them is devoid of all beauty. It is disagreeable for them to see portrayed as truthfully as possible a *milieu* that is really picturesque and curious, but which for them is only uncouth and humiliating; the *milieu* in which their fathers were born and reared and in which, save for mere chance, they themselves would still be living. And there is an inescapable comic aspect of ghetto life. No one has proved

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this better than the Jews themselves, thanks to the splendid Yiddish and Hebraic literature which flourished during the last century in Poland and Russia. If the Jews wish to quarrel with us because we have seen fit to disclose shocking traits, what would they say if they chanced to read the writers of the ghetto? . . . But we believe—we are quite sure—that our books contain something beside the humorous aspect of Israel. There is also its poetry, which we appreciate—and even more keenly than those stupidly Europeanized Israelites who are foolishly satisfied with resembling everybody else. There is that Messiahship, a revolutionary passion which many a Jew, if the truth were told, would like to have us forget, but which at heart is another kind of poetry, the poetry of the race itself.

If Israel had not that indescribable charm

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which casts its spell over one, it could never have interested us. Disparagement is not in our line. We practice neither irony nor caricature, and if we happen to deprecate either persons or things, it is always in the sense of ennoblement.

The position of the Jew in the world is a subject too vast for bitterness, hostility or derision. And, after all, is it not well that I have become accustomed, or rather am naturally inclined, to see all things from a disinterested point of view? To be pro-Semitic or anti-Semitic is a question of which we had not thought. There is in this world a great fact: the Jew. There is a Jewish race, there are Jewish communities, there are various aspects of Jewish activities. In the *Shadow of the Cross*, *A Kingdom of God*, *The Rose of Sharon*, *Next Year at Jerusalem* and *When Israel is King*, we simply faced some of those aspects without worrying about pleasing

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or displeasing, and with the sole desire to ring true. That, then, is what we are trying to do at present in this rapid retrospective glance.

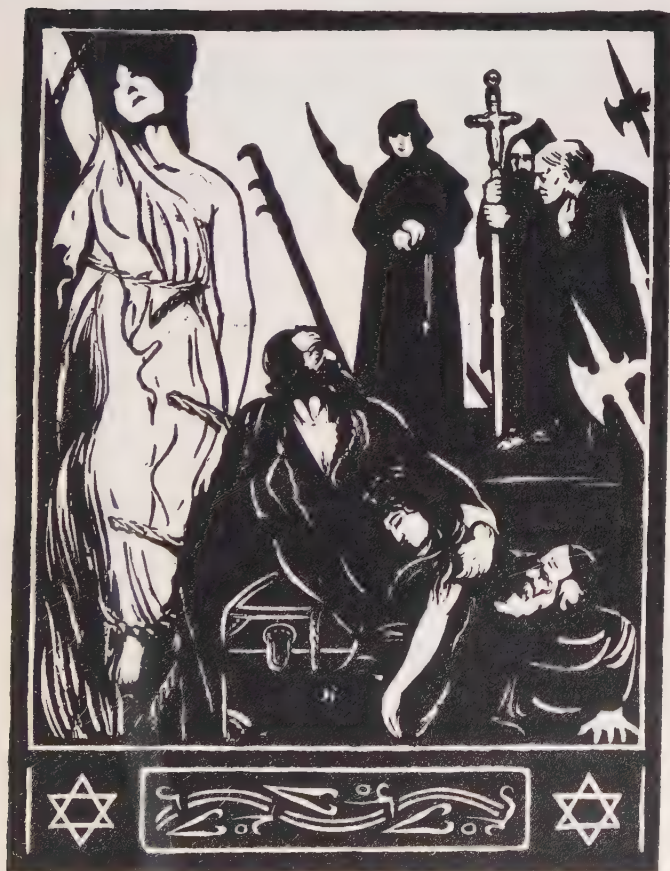
JEROME AND JEAN THARAUD

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I

THE GHETTO



How handsome you are, oh Jew! I have
always loved you
For your intellectual face, so thin and pale.
Your brow is like the frontispiece of a
Holy Book,
Each one of its furrows a line of the
Divine Law.

—*Goldfaden*

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I

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ONE FACT stands out, a fact from which the ghetto sprang: it is Israel's devotion to its Law; that is to say, to the five Books of Moses which, in the Bible, form the Pentateuch, and which the Jews call the Torah.

In a material way, a Torah is a strip of parchment, some thirty yards long, rolled and unrolled like antique manuscripts about two wooden sticks or rods. These Torahs are caligraphed by special copyists called sephorims, who are infinitely cautious in their pious occupation. Always while at work they must wear the attributes of prayer: a little square box, bound to the forehead, which contains a few verses of the Law; a

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narrow strip of leather wound around the left arm and hand; and, finally, the taliss, a black and white woollen scarf, bordered by a long fringe, which is thrown over the head and shoulders.

One may picture an old copyist in his little stall at Cordova, Seville, Frankfort or Amsterdam, his square box on his forehead, his phylacteries encircling his arm, his taliss over his head, and his long beard, which is never cut, carefully hidden in a plait of the scarf to avoid contact with an impure hair which might graze the parchment whereon are inscribed the words of the Eternal. Upon his table are several inkstands and various pens (a special pen and special ink are necessary to write the name of the Lord), and close beside him a pail into which he plunges his hand each time he is about to write the Divinity's name. Before writing this blessed and formidable word, he must pronounce

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a benediction. And certain pious "sephorims," who are still more scrupulous and who are not content with dipping their hands into the water, immerse themselves in the ritual near the Synagogue. Sometimes they bathe fifteen or twenty times a day. . . It is little wonder that certain Torahs have taken many years to copy!

I myself saw the old sopher at Bels, in Poland, who had time to copy only three Torahs during his entire lifetime, so devout was he in executing his task. . . It is he whom I described in the *Shadow of the Cross*. One had only to see him to feel carried back beyond the centuries. He seemed older than all Israel; and, like Israel, he seemed eternal. I have often wondered what could have become of him during the War, in that distant village that was so often taken and retaken by the Austrians and the Russians. What might have happened to him during those

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troubled times, he with his white stockings and white breeches, glimpsed through the flaps of his open caftan? Where, indeed, are all the old "sephorims"? . . . I like to imagine that he has gone to join other great masters of his art out there in the valley of Jehosaphat.

It is to the honor of a community to have several Torahs, shut up in the cupboard of the Synagogue. The curtain of that cupboard is embroidered with the seal of Solomon, or the Lions of Judah, and conceals sometimes ten or twelve Torahs, all carefully sheathed in silk or velvet. Each Saturday one is brought out, and the lessons for the week are read, just as the Gospel of our faith is read. And once a year, at the Feast of the Law, all the Torahs are produced and paraded with great pomp, each covered with its precious robe and crowned by a little hat, ornamented by tiny jingling bells. In the Synagogue of the Occident this ceremony always

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has the solemn and slightly chilly note with which civilization touches all religious things. But in the mystic Synagogues of oriental Europe are passion and enthusiasm. Beer and brandy are copiously consumed. People jostle each other, none too gently, in their struggle to touch the precious rolls with their finger tips. I saw this and then I understood the charming and tender name of "crowned fiancée" given to the Torah out there.

However, you are not to conclude at once that the people of Israel have lived uniquely according to the five Books of Moses, as did a Calvinist of Geneva and Scotland who regulated his entire life by the Bible. It is certain that the Jews have always read the Torah; they know it by heart, and if they have always been literate it is because a knowledge of the Law is their sacred obligation. But besides the "crowned fiancée," there is another book which influences the life

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of Israel perhaps even more than the Torah itself. That book is the Talmud.

According to popular legend, the Talmud, like the Torah, was divinely inspired. Moses heard about it on Mount Sinai, but Our Lord forbade him to perpetuate it in writing, saying that the Gentiles might translate it into their language and utilize it. He even added, "He who possesses my mysteries is my son, and in oral tradition alone lie my mysteries." Those mysteries were the Talmud.

In an ordinary edition of the book there are no fewer than twelve volumes. To give you an idea of it (somewhat summary, but nevertheless exact), I can best compare it to an immense collection of newspaper and magazine clippings, gathered together by journalists of Israel from the capture of Babylon, some five hundred years before Christ, until about the fourth century of the Christian era. By the word journalists, one

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is to understand the rabbis and doctors whose entire intellectual activity was to interpret the Law, adapt it to the needs of the commoner and, in accordance with the ancient text, form the rules of Jewish life. More than two thousand rabbis, whose names are known, and a host of others who have been forgotten, have collaborated in this work. It is the class-book of lessons they teach in their schools. Now it happens that the commentators have often neglected their source (the books of Moses) and that they have merely dabbled endlessly with commentary upon commentary. So there is a little of everything in this formidable array of philosophical, historical, legal and moral discussion. Amid an unheard of disorder it is an immense epitome of all that transpired in the minds of intellectual Jews for seven or eight hundred years. Therefore, far from furnishing a precise doctrine—something comparable, for instance, to the dream

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of St. Thomas, which is a systematic and well-knitted whole—the Talmud approaches all its questions with manifold and often frankly contradictory opinions. In our *Rose of Sharon* we have quoted several instances of its bizarre casuistry, senseless logic and recurrent extravagance.

What objects may one wear on the Holy Sabbath without breaking the law which forbids wearing anything at all, and how should one wear them? What beasts may be led to pasture on that day, and how must one lead them, since it is not permitted to carry anything in one's hand? What distance may one walk of a Saturday, and how is it possible to prolong that distance? To what pitch may one raise his voice in prayer? Is it enough to hear oneself, or must one be heard by everybody? What shall one do if, having climbed a tree, he discovers that the hour for prayer has rung? If a snake twists

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itself around one's leg, should one go right on praying? And what to do if it is a venomous reptile? Is it permitted to kill a chicken or a flea on the Sabbath? Or eat an egg laid on Saturday? How many white hairs may a sacrificial red cow have in its coat and still be a red cow? Should the High Priest put on his shirt before his breeches?

The list of these absurdities is fairly inexhaustible. But beside its very strangeness are the beliefs, sentiments, hopes, superstitions, legends, tales, religious practices, theology, and legislation of ten centuries of Jewish existence; five centuries before Christ, five after His coming. A motley medley, sometimes perfectly absurd, but often noble in inspiration, a spirit of law far superior to that of the Romans, and sometimes to the very accent of Jesus.

But you will say, "If the Talmud is so confused, muddled and often contradictory, how can

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the Jew know how to react to it?" Well, he doesn't know; and throughout the centuries, in the oriental communities, it has always delighted him hugely to raise new problems over those proposed in the venerable Book. He has split hairs, reconciled the irreconcilable and found loopholes for insoluble questions. He has, in short, employed that subtlety so natural to the Jewish mind; and this commentary of the Talmud has seemed to develop it to excess during some hundreds of years.

Nevertheless, a few positive and practical rules of living had to be drawn from this confusion. I do not know just what rabbi extracted from the chaos the six hundred and thirteen commandments which order all Jewish life from birth to death. But from sunrise to sunset, they prescribe and direct everything. They govern the masters, the masters' children and the servants, the animals, the dwellings, the food

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and clothing. And for a pious Jew every movement, deed or thought thus becomes a religious gesture.

And so it is quite clear that nothing can differ more than these two books, the Old Testament and the Talmud. One is the issue of the other, but no two literary works could be more unlike. The Old Testament, a wonderful oriental fairy tale, a pastoral and warlike poem, an idyll of nomad existence. The Talmud, born of the Torah but resembling it very little, since it is steadily abstract, full of logic, casuistry, and even quibbling. It smacks of oil and the lamp, not of the desert's life of freedom. Lacking, as it does, the glowing tales to which one listens open-mouthed beneath a tent, it is the book over which one ponders with knitted brows the while he mechanically plucks the hairs from his beard—hairs, by the way, carefully left between the pages to prove the strain of one's thought, where-

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fore certain Talmuds which I have had at hand strangely resemble disgusting herbariums.

But such as they are, that code and poem shaped the destiny of Israel. It was in order to put the Holy Torah and the "crowned fiancée" beyond all profanation that the Jews shut themselves up into the ghetto. It has been to live according to the Talmud that, for hundreds of years, they have led a life apart, with unchanging customs, unchanging thought. Everywhere that fate has pushed them they have united at once to form a community around the generally miserable dwelling wherein are sheltered, as in the Ark, the rolls of the Torah. On whatever shores they landed, these people who had lost a country united to form another. "Just as to-day," says Bernard Lazare, in his clear-sighted essay on anti-Semitism, "we see the British, who resemble them in so many ways, building homes, creating an England and living as at Ox-

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ford or Cambridge, in whatever realm they have set foot."

And so it is that Israel has accomplished this paradox: without any territory properly its own, it has yet remained a people—if one considers that mutual ways of living, thinking, desiring and hoping constitute a race. In this sense Israel, though dispersed, is as unified and great as any other nation—France, for example, or England, each with its perfectly limited boundaries. As to the realm of the Jewish people, and their share in world affairs, each is free to regard them as he will. But one must admire their success in remaining as they are despite the most hostile conditions any race has ever met.

One of the principal reasons for this hostility to Israel springs, I believe, precisely from that desire to remain apart, to lead everywhere its individual existence. You know what happens when a stranger arrives in any one of our own

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little villages and wishes to live a life that is not like everybody else's. Immediately the village or township is up in arms, starts a thousand pernicious stories about him and speaks ill of his house. I well remember the reprobation that the men of my regiment, who came from Char-ente, felt during the war for the British soldier whose nourishment was different from ours. Put yourself in the place of a Christian of the Middle Ages, and try to imagine what he thought about the infidel who lived apart in a separate quarter, leading a secret life of which almost nothing was known save vague notions about strange customs in general and food in particular. Instinctively the Christian detested him, since the Jew bore the indelible stain of having crucified our Savior. But popular imagination did not stop here. If the Jew led a hidden life, it must have been because he had something to hide. To him at once were attributed frightful

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deformities, vices, crimes, abject customs, the whole horrifying list of which may be read in Christian and Jewish chronicles. If he never doffed his hat, in accordance with his Law, it must have been because, like the goat, he had horns on his forehead. It was only a step from this to the decision that, like the devil, he had a caudal appendix, as Bernard Lazare humorously suggests. During all the Middle Ages it was reported that the Jew had scrofula, blood flushes and infirmities of the breath which obliged him to hang his head; and that during the night his tongue was infested by worms. To each of the twelve tribes was ascribed a special ill. Those of the tribe of Reuben had raised their hand against Jesus, and so they withered everything they touched, the rumor ran. Those of the tribe of Simeon had nailed Christ to the Cross, and therefore, during four days a year, their feet bore bloody stigmas. . .

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And it happened that the Jew, who deliberately lived under these peculiar conditions, who shut himself up in his private quarters to preserve the integrity of his belief and his race, found himself confined there by force. What, at the outset, was merely a Jewish custom or habit, a law that Israel took upon itself, was finally imposed from without. One day he was told, "You wanted to live in your special quarter with your Law, your ideas and your customs? Well, then, stay there forever. All other parts of the town will be refused you. Here are the chains, here is a door henceforth limiting the space in which you may breathe. Your ghetto will no longer be a voluntary refuge; it becomes an obligatory jail!"

The Jews have always reproached the Church for having been the first to formulate this sentiment. They charge it with having maintained an ambiguous attitude toward them throughout

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the Middle Ages. It is quite true that on one hand the Papacy protected them as witnesses of Christ's victory over the Synagogue; and it is true that the Jews were nowhere treated better than in the Papal cities of Rome and Avignon. On the other hand, the Church was always careful to maintain suspicion about Israel; and as its authority stretched far into the Occident, the measures it recommended were universally accepted. Without doubt it was the Church that made a legal prison of the Jews' voluntary confinement. It was the Church that obliged them, whenever they went out, to wear a square or round band of red and yellow cloth, placed on the shoulder or the hat (as if they were not already so easily recognizable!). This was really in imitation of the Mussulmans. That band which the Jews wore during six endless centuries, and which called down blows and derision upon them, seems to have been invented by the Sultan

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Yakoub El Mansour, conqueror of Spain, who is reported to have said, "If I were sure the Jews would become sincerely converted to Islamism, I would permit them to marry with the Mussulmans. If, on the contrary, I knew that they would persist in their ancient faith, I would run them all through with my sword. But I have my doubts. Therefore, I desire that they wear clothing which will make them conspicuous and absurd."

A Papal Bull forbade the Jews any employment which gave them authority over Christians.

Before this interdiction they were often raised to the highest positions. A Jew who fortunately gained the good graces of a Prince by his medical knowledge (medicine is an art which they learned from the Arabians and in which they excelled) soon became a confidant, and even an emissary on difficult missions. In Spain they became Chancellors and Ministers of Finance.

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And constantly the Papacy was obliged to remind kings, ecclesiastics and nobles that it formally forbade conferring eminent offices upon the Jews; that it considered this practice extremely dangerous to Christian society.

It was the Papacy that confined Israel to a single activity which became its exclusive privilege: traffic in gold. This commerce, almost as much as the retired life in the ghetto, established one of the most striking traits of Israel, and isolation in the trade developed exactly as had isolation in a special district. The traffic in gold on which Israel lived almost exclusively during the Middle Ages, and which it still follows so freely to-day, was originally a profession of its own choice. Since the Dispersion and the fall of the Temple, it has always been the Jews' big business. The reasons are many. Here are these clever, sagacious people, scattered to the four corners of the globe. They

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had to make a living somehow! "Watch," says Bernard Lazare, "colonizers like the Dutch or the English arriving on a foreign territory. Their first care is to found a bank, or a counter, and commence business." Among all the different traffics of the Middle Ages, bartering in gold especially tempted the Jews. The Church forbade lending at interest, and severely punished clerks and laymen for usury. The Jew, then, who did not belong to the Church, escaped this interdiction. You will say, of course, that the Church should have forbidden him to carry on a business which it disapproved. But this commerce was necessary. Some one had to conduct it. Gold was needed. Probably gold, as a sign of wealth, never has played a part comparable to its rôle during the Middle Ages. We think little about it to-day, but at a time when industry and credit were unknown, gold and soil represented the only wealth. . . Hence the

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Middle Ages' passion in seeking the philosopher's stone that would transmute the commonest metals into gold and give infinite power to him who possessed the secret.

The Papacy, the kings, the high ecclesiastical dignitaries, the lords of the laity and later the bourgeois were only too glad to find in the Jew a man who joyfully risked the censure placed by the Councils and Fathers of the Church upon the traffic in a commodity so necessary. Thus the Jew found open before him an indispensable and cursed career, and for several centuries he was almost alone in pursuing it. How could he resist? The whole world encouraged him at it. Everything favored his success: his instinct, his interest, his religious Law itself, since it forbade him to cultivate foreign soil—"dig foreign ground," as the Talmud says. And when the persecutions commenced, this commerce in gold offered extraordinary advantages, since he might

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flee unfriendly shores, taking with him an easily carried wealth. Or if he preferred to remain, he might purchase his safety—though always a little precariously—with ready cash.

Another consideration is at the bottom of Israel's soul, is at the heart of its deepest revery: whether openly or not, it has always considered itself the Chosen People, destined to dominate all other nations. To realize this sublime destiny, gold was the only force at hand, since the laws of the countries where one lived crippled all other means of action.

And this mystic idea was supported by another one, likewise mystic: at any moment the Messiah might appear, the miraculous Savior who would lead Israel back into its lost land. Since that blessed day might arrive to-morrow, why should he acquire property, homes and wealth, all impossible to move? Gold alone was movable, movable as Ahaseurus himself; and, like

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him, always ready to follow one either to a new exile, or over the triumphal road back to Jerusalem.

That, then, is why the Jew stood behind his exchange table voluntarily and joyfully. It was not until later that Christian laws riveted him to his counter and kept him there as in his ghetto. They forbade him also to buy the ground, become a landed proprietor or join the workmen's corporations, which in a sense were religious institutions watched over by a saint. He was definitely confined to the selling of gold and cast-off articles.

But this commerce in gold which Israel had commenced by choosing, and then was chosen for, was a new reason—among others already assembled—for hating the Jew. More than any other business, this one aroused extraordinary jealousies. Once they handled gold professionally, the Jews faced a hostile world: sovereigns,

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men in power, the clergy—all strained toward the (sometimes imaginary) wealth of the Jews. The poor blamed them for their miseries and misfortunes. The bourgeois suspected and hence detested them as competitors.

Indeed, one may say that the Jew shaped his own destiny. He chose the ghetto; he condemned himself to gold; and the Church and its legislation merely carried out the double sentence that he brought upon himself. But what one does voluntarily and what one does under pressure are not at all the same thing. The immense distance between the two is an abyss separating liberty from servitude. If you are jailed even in your own house, that house changes its aspect the day it becomes a prison. . .

Did the Church win by thus isolating Israel in a special quarter, a milieu? One of my Jewish friends used to say, "It is not in spite of persecution that Israel has kept its national character.

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It is because of it." A great truth. That exceptional legislation fortified particularism in Israel. In France, Italy and Germany it has forever met the same barriers, the same restrictive laws. Countries changed, perhaps, and so did their economic and mental atmosphere. But he, the Jew, remained always the same, since laws have never altered as far as he was concerned. Everywhere his was the same occupation, the same religious and social life. In all the different ghettos, widespread over Europe, Israel has lived for centuries as if those ghettos had been but one. And so the result the Church obtained was not at all what it had hoped for. Its steady desire has been to convert the Jews to Christianity. But its policy only bound them to themselves. Their solitary confinement, since it was arbitrary, helped strongly to conserve them as a people. It gave them a home.

And so there they were, settled down in their

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sordid but beloved retreat, the ghetto. And drama awaited them in those little exiled niches.

First of all, as one may have seen and will continue to see throughout their history, there was the struggle against the surroundings of Christian society. At once the most dramatic and tragic of their contentions, it very often ended in expulsion or the funeral pyre. And even without such dramatic aspects, the everyday life of the Jews was not precisely gay. There were the worry, uneasiness and torture of almost universal abuse. It is only fair to fill out this black picture by saying that in those unhappy times life was a bed of roses for only a very few people. I question whether the serf attached to the glebe was happier than the Jew. The latter had at least moments of respite between two persecutions. When he had paid the tribute exacted by his lord, he was free to live fairly peacefully. But the serf also was taxable and draftable, and

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was pillaged if he possessed anything; moreover, he faced an obligation from which Israel was exempt: war, and the furnishing of men in arms to his master.

I believe that the number of Jews burned or massacred during five or six hundred years would not compare to that of the innumerable poor devils who fell in the course of incessant château and frontier warfare.

It must be added that this drama of persecution was not peculiar to the ghetto. All heretics went through it and suffered alike. The Jews inured themselves to Christianity, as the sailor does to the sea and the mountaineer to avalanches. It seems to me to be particularly notable about ghetto life, and of special psychological interest, this drama of the converted. Converted in good faith, or by hatred of their milieu, the christianized Jews have always hated their co-religionists incredibly. These are the

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renegades who have pointed out Israel's vulnerable spots, these turn-coats who indicated in the books of the Jews all that could excite ecclesiastic anger. It was through them that the Christians glimpsed what went on in the minds and lives of these Hebrew communities. It was always at their instance that the Talmud was so often condemned and burned. . . Further on I shall present a startling example of this.

But of all the ghetto's dramas, the most profound and intense is certainly that which pits the old Hebrew thought against the Jews themselves, and not against the Christians or the renegades.

The pious Jews of mediæval Europe must be envisioned as they pored over the Law and the Talmud, which contained the most ancient existing ideas. In their tiny ostracized quarters they knew no law save that of their rabbis, who personified tradition, implacable rule, submission to the strictest observance of the most minute

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commandments woven into the skein of life. It is this old and arid spirit, passionately a part of the letter of the Law, which Jesus had found and fought against in ancient Judea. The rabbis maintained it fiercely, stubbornly, exasperated by the vexations that had to be brooked; and, too, by a very just feeling that only this defence of traditional thought could keep a dispersed people together. The masses, of course, obeyed joyfully. It was a soothing experience, on returning home after a day of atrocious Christian contacts, to purify oneself in the sacred customs, and to be reassured by an eager submission to all the rites. Outside, one might be insulted and disdained, but here one became once again of the Chosen People, the people of the Book, the Law, the slave of God.

Nevertheless, there were spirits unsatisfied by this formalistic and thoughtless religion. By two reactions, intellectual and emotional, Israel

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tried to escape the suffocating despotism of his rabbis and the Talmud. One movement was purely rationalistic, an intelligent outburst; the other was a mystic step, a soaring flight of the imagination and the heart. Both occurred almost at once in the thirteenth century. But although it happened long ago, one should not think of it as ancient history. Those two movements continue throughout all of Israel's story. Their conflict in other days, and even now, forms the precise subject of "The Chosen People."

II

THE REVOLT OF THE MIND



“Thou shalt make of study neither a
crown to adorn thee nor a mattock to
bury thee.”

—*Proverb quoted by Maimonides*

II

THE REVOLT OF THE MIND

IT WAS a certain Maimonides who first attempted to air out the ghetto. He was born in Spain during the Middle Ages, at a time when the Moors were ruling that country, and the Jews were actively participating in the brilliant Semitic civilization which the Arabs had developed there.

By logic that was now philosophical and now historical, Maimonides attempted to explain all those religious prescriptions to which the Jews conformed so vigorously and incomprehensively. He did his best to put order into that chaos of tradition, discussion, digression and contradictory theory that forms the Talmud. He wanted

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to throw a little light into that immense and sombre compilation, wherein it was most difficult—indeed, impossible—to see clearly. He sought to sift a few general ideas out of masses of detail. He abridged, he demolished; accepted here, rejected there; made, in short, a new Talmud—clear, comprehensible, orderly—that is, something wholly different from the true Talmud, which is the exact opposite of a precise and definite compilation.

His most celebrated work, *A Guide to the Perplexed*, suggests Maimonides's working method. He did for Jewish thought what Saint Thomas Aquinas was to do later for Christian theology: he conciliated revealed religion with the philosophy of Aristotle, which was then considered the highest expression of reasoning. Through this he was led to introduce into Judaism, into that oriental thought which had hith-

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erto been self-sustaining, something completely foreign to it: the elements of Greek logic.

Well, there was tumult in Israel. The Jews divided in two camps, unequal in strength but equal in passionate feeling. The partisans of Maimonides were the few Jews who approved of free reasoning. Against him were those who reproached him with making religion the handmaid of philosophy, reducing miracles to mere natural events, and considering prophecies as imaginative triumphs rather than direct, divine inspirations. They said he denied the existence of a paradise or an inferno, and that he had a spiritualistic theory of the immortality of the soul which definitely contradicted the traditional Judaic one, providing as this does for an after life through the resurrection of the body.

The struggle became even more intense after the philosopher's death. As so often happens,

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his disciples exaggerated their master's thoughts and arrived at this conclusion: that to be a good Jew it sufficed to know the reasons which inspired the Law; but in innumerable cases the observance of the Law itself was useless and even ridiculous, since the reasons which had once justified those practices no longer existed.

But the pure Talmudists clung to the integrity of the old rites, worship and beliefs. The more intelligent merely thought that Maimonides, in making a clear and orderly construction of the Talmud, wherein one could no longer wander at random throughout a thousand hypotheses, had impoverished this old and beloved book; and that, to a certain extent, he had abolished the intellectual accomplishment of this inexhaustible text. But most of the rabbis, hostile to anything new, clung literally to the principle of the Talmud: "Prevent your children from thinking." Above all, they saw peril for Judaism in

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philosophy and reasoning, and with a clairvoyant fervor asserted that should Israel fail to reject completely everything that was not the Law it would condemn itself to death and dissolution among foreign nations. A certain Levite from Montpellier even called upon the Inquisition to seize and burn all the works of Maimonides which had been treasured in Jewish homes, on the pretext that his ideas were pernicious to Christian as well as Jewish minds. A Synod of Rabbis assembled at Barcelona and excommunicated all Jews twenty-five years of age who read anything except the Bible and the Talmud. A few provincial rabbis, who had kept in touch with Arabian civilization, resisted, but in vain. Those very Jews whom the entire world was tormenting because of their faith now persecuted their fellow believers as no one had ever persecuted *them*. For two centuries in Spain, France, Italy and Holland, only a few isolated

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spirits were able to maintain Jewish intellectuality. Again the masses were entombed beneath the influence of the obscurantist rabbis; more than ever they lived secluded in their ghettos and in their own thoughts, with no other spiritual activity than a vigilant attention to ritual ceremonies and the calling down of benedictions on everything conceivable. The futile casuistic discussions continued, and in his obscure Synagogues the Jew went on proposing idle questions, without really giving them a thought. And why should he think? The rabbis were there to answer any questions that he might ask!—All they had to do was dip down into the eternal Talmudic code. Deliberately, then, Israel renounced free thinking, the only escape from the ghetto it ever had. And in renouncing it, the nation sank deep into what was narrowest in the ghetto's genius.

Yet nothing could better have conserved Israel

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and strengthened it than the terrible life it had to lead until the sixteenth century. The thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were the hardest in its existence. The Inquisition, expulsion, massacres—everything bound the Jew more passionately than ever to the causes of his misfortune: his traditions and his Law. The Church burned his books; sovereigns and princes exiled him to confiscate his wealth; the masses insulted him, pillaged his shops, desecrated his cemeteries, derided his Feasts and plundered his Synagogues. Graetz, in his history of the Jews (a monument of erudition comparable only to Mommsen's Roman History), describes in detail these outrages. Before setting forth to deliver the Holy Sepulchre, the Crusaders first tried out their force on the Jews. When the pest raged, the Jews were offered as a holocaust. Everywhere—in England, Spain, Italy, Bohemia, France, Austria, Moravia and

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Poland—they were massacred by hundreds. At Strasbourg, Mayence and Troyes they were burned. In Spain thousands of Jews, forcibly converted to Christianity after the expulsion of the Moors and yet suspected of secretly practicing their ancient faith, mounted the funeral pile. It is easy to see why, in those dark hours, they found more comfort in blind belief than in the lukewarm Judaism of a Maimonides. Philosophy produces no martyrs; and Israel, whom we see so timid, cowering and indifferent to insult, so incapable of pride or revolt outside its restricted quarters, courageously bore the burden by its fidelity to ancient traditions. The most astonishing thing is that from these ghettos where life was so dramatic, where it would seem that misfortune must have started up the poetry of tears, no poem came, no song of sorrow or sublime and woeful note to grip humanity.

Israel suffered, but did not write the poem of

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its wretched fate. Among all its misfortunes it seems to me the greatest that during hundreds of years it never spoke the deep and heartfelt tones that might have moved the world and so perhaps have changed its own destiny. One waits and waits to hear this wail of Jewish distress, and suffers because it never rises. All the resignation on earth is not worth a single cry of revolt.

With the sixteenth century there came, if not an end of the ghetto's great misery, at least a very perceptible lightening of its distress. The Renaissance ushered in new and humane thought, and a decided softening of spirit and manners. The winter had passed and spring had come, brusque and rapid as the spring in Italy, quickly touching everything. The new season ministered to the Jews. The temperature of the world around them subsided, and the ghetto profited by it.

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Semitic literature has always aroused the curiosity of humanists. Few of them knew the Arabian tongue, and so it was through Hebrew taught by Jewish teachers that they came to know Averroès and the Arabian philosophers. Pico della Mirandola in Italy, and Reuchlin in Germany, were as enthusiastic about the Bible as they were about Latin and Greek. In many German cities, where no Jew ever lived, Hebraic presses were in use for the benefit of Christian scholars. The Sorbonne, which in Saint Louis' time ordered the Talmud burned, decided to found a chair at Rheims for the teaching of Hebrew. Friendly relations between Christians and Jews developed the more easily because the Renaissance, swayed by its love for pagan antiquity, stirred religious scepticism in many minds. When one really is enthusiastic about Jupiter and Venus one is less moved to hate the

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people who have no love for Jesus and the Virgin.

The reform developing at the very heart of the Renaissance also favored the Jews. Nothing could have been more natural. A great many new thoughts which were transforming Europe's philosophical and religious points of view sprang directly from Israel, or from Arabian thought interpreted and translated into Hebrew. Criticism of Catholic dogma and interpretations of holy books were certainly not created by those who started the Reform. They had long existed in Jewish and Arabian books; Lutheran and Calvinistic Reformists merely took credit for most of the arguments contained in that Semitic literature which attacked the very principles of the Roman Catholic Faith. They borrowed from it abundantly, and it is no exaggeration to say that the Protestant judgment of Catholicism

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came almost entirely from the criticism made for centuries by the Hebrew and Arabian philosophers.

Therefore one must not be astonished by a fact which is often hidden, but really is strikingly significant. The vast movement of religious reform which broke out under Luther in Germany had been prepared years before by a great intellectual agitation over the Talmud, whose life is mingled with the fate of Israel. Graetz has emphasized the point, and here is the story in a word:

I have already noted that the Jews had no greater enemies than their own people converted to Christianity. A few years before Luther's rebellion against Rome, a Jew from Cologne, a certain Pfefferkorn, of doubtful morality and condemned at the time for theft by the Rabbinistic Tribunal, adopted the Roman Faith. His first concern was to denounce to the Inquisitor

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of Cologne (a Dominican named Hochstracht) the religious books of the Jews in general, and the Talmud in particular. The renegade and the Friar obtained from Emperor Maximilian an edict authorizing them to confiscate in the synagogues and private residences all books belonging to the Jews. The humanist John Reuchlin, who with Erasmus was the greatest man of the entire German Renaissance, was concerned in the affair. He happened to know Hebrew, he was of considerable reputation, and he held an important charge from the Emperor. The latter ordered him to report on the subject of Jewish books. Reuchlin openly declared that not only were the Jewish commentaries on the Bible not to be condemned, but that they were indispensable to the study of the Christian religion. Although he admitted that he was lost in the immense labyrinth of the Talmud, and understood very little of it, he very strongly opposed the idea

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of burning it. "For," he said, "those who wish to burn it don't know any more about it than I do. And what would one think of an ignoramus who might demand the destruction of all books on mathematics merely because he did not understand them?"

This memorandum of Reuchlin's helped the Jews and satisfied the Emperor, who was anxious to keep peace, but irritated the Dominican at Cologne extremely. The affair went before the Pope with Reuchlin on one side and the Inquisition on the other. Then commenced an almost interminable trial which held the attention of all intellectual Germany, and from which Reuchlin emerged triumphantly.

This long litigation, the "Dreyfus Case" of the period, so to speak, had raised many a thorny question while it lasted. A multitude of pamphlets, by humanists or Jews, had openly attacked institutions and ideas that hitherto had

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been beyond questioning. This struggle had served as a pretext for violent criticism of the monks—their ignorance, fanaticism and immorality; the attack included the Inquisition, Rome itself, and the entire order of things which Luther was soon to combat with impassioned genius. One may even say that Luther merely continued the quarrel started by Reuchlin and his friends over the Talmud. When he declares that a Christian's first duty in forming his religious tenets is to study the Bible and its Jewish commentators, he simply adopts Reuchlin's point of view. When he attacks Rome, the Pope and the monks, he develops with somewhat more talent the ideas to which the humanist pamphlets had accustomed public opinion during the Reuchlin trial. His powerful personality merely promoted a debate which, without him, would perhaps have remained only a simple quarrel like many others between humanists and theologians.

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It is not too much to say that this discussion over the Talmud, preceding the Reform, created the atmosphere of dispute and ideational battle which always heralds a religious or political revolution. One must not conclude too quickly, however, that the Protestant Reform favored Israel. No Pope was ever more anti-Semitic than Luther. And yet, at the beginning of his quarrel with Rome, Luther, like Reuchlin, had declared himself in favor of the Jews.

“Papists, bishops, sophists and monks,” he said, “all those madmen have treated the Jews in such a way that all good Christians ought to wish to become Jews. If I had been a Jew, and had seen Christianity inspire such wicked actions, I should have preferred to be a swine. They have acted like dogs toward the Jews, and have outraged them, and yet these Jews are closely related to Our Lord. If you wish to help them, try to accord them the Christian law

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of love, and not the orders of the Pope. Welcome them benevolently, let them work with you, so that they may wish to remain with you.”

The truth is that Luther, like the Popes, had hoped to convert Israel to this new religion which followed the Old rather than the New Testament. Israel deceived him. Israel did not follow Luther any more than it followed the Church; and, later, the still violent Luther wrote these lines, which hardly resemble those just quoted: “The Jews are brutes, their Synagogues are pig styes and ought to be burned. Moses would do it were he to come back to earth. They drag the Divine Lord in the mud, they live badly and on plunder. They are malicious beasts who should be wiped out like mad dogs.”

Such hostility bore bitter fruit for the Jews. Instead of proving itself a tolerant religion, Protestantism took over the old hatred of the Church against the deistic people, and the Luth-

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eran and Calvinistic countries hardly showed any more brotherly feeling for Israel than the Catholic countries had done.

Nevertheless, in a certain way the Reform benefited the Jews. Everywhere that it triumphed it brought a spirit of equality and social revolt, a sort of communistic sentiment seen in furious uprisings here and there among the peasantry, especially in the Rhone valley as the sixteenth century opened. The mobs no longer rallied around the cry of "Death to the Jew!" The new war cry was "In Christ, neither masters nor slaves!" Everyone who owned anything was attacked: the lords and clergy, and their châteaux and monasteries. Certainly the Jew was still detested, but hardly more than the landowner, the monk or the bourgeois. He stopped being the scape-goat of the people, now in revolt against their miserable condition. The

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people had discovered with joy that they had others to hate.

In the regions which remained Catholic the Jews were left alone. Absorbed in its struggle against new adversaries, the Church forgot its old enemies for a moment. It was quite aware of the fact that in Luther and Calvin was to be found all the old Semitic spirit it had always fought against. Would Israel profit by this respite? In this Renaissance, this great thawing of the mind, was it, too, going to thaw out? Was Israel, whose thought has contributed so much—indirectly but surely—to the Renaissance and the Reform, was it to take up cudgels and enter frankly into the fray? Was it to have its own renaissance—the reform of the ghetto?

Not at all. The rabbis seem never to have had so much influence over their communities as when the Church was losing that all-powerful

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authority it had wielded so long and steadily. Never did the Jews sink more deeply, more obstinately into the most formalistic aspects of their Law. Never was the spirit of free thinking less successful in Israel than when this same spirit was triumphing all over Europe. At the instant when the Occident emerged from the Middle Ages, from which the Jews had suffered so much, the latter turned with disgust from the new era just then commencing. They isolated themselves more than ever in their ghettos and their thoughts. Here follows a dramatic example of their behavior.

III

THE SYNAGOGUE DEFENDS ITSELF



“In Portugal as a Christian, they called
me Gabriel da Costa, and among the Jews
(what demon drove me toward them?)
my name was Uriel.”

—*da Costa*

III

THE SYNAGOGUE DEFENDS ITSELF

THE community at Amsterdam was supposed, during the sixteenth century, to be the most enlightened of the European Jewish communities. It was established toward the end of the fifteenth century by a very peculiar type of Jew called Marranes, from Portugal and Spain.

Throughout the Middle Ages Spain had been a land of privileges for the Jews. Three quarters of the country were then occupied by the Moors, the rest by petty sovereigns. Neither the Moors nor the Christians sympathized particularly with the Jews. Nevertheless, they were well treated, for here as elsewhere the gold traf-

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fic was in their hands, and for centuries they had indifferently furnished one or the other adversary with the funds needed for war.

The result was a very favorable situation for Israel. Even in the Catholic kingdoms of Aragon, Castille and Navarre, and in spite of pontifical prescriptions, the Jews did not have to wear their special garb. Indeed, they distinguished themselves by their elegant silken garments; they wore the dirk, carried the sword and rode on horses or mules, which of course was unheard of among them anywhere else in Europe. To this day the descendants of Spanish Jews bear traces of this happy past, and are easily recognizable by an elegance of manner lacking in their co-religionists of the North.

But those palmy days did not last long. As fast as the Christian princes reconquered their country from the Arabs, the Jews' status became precarious. They were less needed now, and

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intolerance grew with the arrogance of victory. In self-preservation a great many became Christians, though most of them secretly continued to practice the rites of their former religion.

Doors and shutters closed, they celebrated the Sabbath, put on white shirts, pronounced the ritual benediction over the wine cup that circled the table, and observed functional prescriptions. In short, although officially Christians, they did everything they could to live as they had always done.

These christianized Jews, so distrusted by the Spanish Catholics, were called Marranes, or “the damned.” They numbered thousands. In spite of public suspicion, their activity and intelligence had won them the highest rank in State affairs. They comprised not only bankers and intellectuals, but Canons, Bishops, Archbishops and Ministers. Such brilliant success naturally aroused great anger, and during the fifteenth

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century they endured many treacherous moments. Yet they did not cease multiplying until the last Moorish king was driven from Grenada.

Free at last of the Arabs, Ferdinand and Isabella resolved likewise to get rid of the Jews, who represented the last vestiges of Asia. Curiously enough, that same Isabella who could no longer tolerate a single Jew in her kingdom, who introduced the Inquisition into Spain and named Torquemada the Grand Inquisitor, chose an orthodox Jew for a prime minister—Isaac Abrabanel, faithful to every trait of his race, who preferred leaving Spain to renouncing his Law! The Queen also chose a Jew for her Minister of Finance, one Abraham Senior, who became a Marrane, and until his death was the sovereign's most intimate confidant. I might even make a note here of the evil tongues that whispered that her husband, King Ferdinand, was the grandson of a Jewess called "Paloma."

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After that decree of expulsion, the Jew had only the choice between baptism and exile. Three hundred thousand chose exile; the others were immersed in baptismal fonts from which they emerged Marranes. But these wholesale conversions never seemed sufficiently sincere; bands of Marranes mounted Torquemada's funeral piles. Many sought refuge in Portugal, where the Inquisition was not yet established. But the Tribunal was not long in coming there, too, and it was then that thousands of Marranes, hunted down over the entire peninsula, secretly took ship. Some of them went to Bordeaux (like the Lopez family, from which Montaigne descended on his mother's side), others went to some other country of the Lavant, and still others journeyed to the Low Countries or Netherlands.

In full revolt against Spain, Holland could not easily reject those wanderers who brought

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with them their hatred for the common enemy. Furthermore, the Dutch were some time in discovering that the newcomers were Jews. On landing, they called themselves Christians, and for a certain length of time they continued to lead, in Holland, the double life they had led in Spain. Then suddenly they unmasked, built a Synagogue, and the authorities at Amsterdam had to face an accomplished fact. These emigrants represented the élite of Spain and they had in many cases successfully smuggled away precious stones and money. Nor was their commercial sharpness to be disdained. The new community was officially recognized; and as the Netherlands had rallied to Calvinism, the Jews escaped the restrictive laws so vigorously promoted in Catholic lands.

It would seem that in this new milieu, which welcomed them so cordially and liberally, these refugees who lately had known the most brilliant

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rank ought to have raised themselves above the level of all ordinary European ghettos. But they did not. These former Marranes participated most actively in the commercial life of their adopted country, but they remained quite apart from the big intellectual movement then sweeping all Europe. More than ever they retired into their ghetto and Talmud, deep in thoughts without horizon. And if one of them dared protest against the dry and shrivelled Law, or sought fresh intellectual air in the stifling Synagogue, the story of Uriel Acosta will tell you how he was treated.

Gabriel Acosta belonged to a family of Marranes from Oporto. He had studied Law in that city, at the Jesuit College, and might have "stood" for some ecclesiastical dignity. But soon he commenced to doubt the truths of the Christian religion. He began to study the Old Testament, and little by little became convinced

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that the truth was not in Catholicism, but in the ancient religion of his ancestors. He and his brother successfully eluded the police of the Grand Inquisitor, who was watching these suspicious Judo-Christians very closely. Finally, travelling by sea, they reached Holland. There they returned joyfully to their ancestral religion and Acosta, abandoning his baptismal name of Gabriel, took that of Uriel.

He was of uneasy disposition, and almost at once ghetto life disenchanted him. At a distance he had seen it under false and flattering colors.

Yes, the former Catholic and Jesuit pupil, who had never lived the Jewish life but had only dreamed of it through a mirage of Biblical scenes, was profoundly deceived. At Amsterdam he found neither the vision of the Prophets nor the broad influence of the Book which had so changed the world. He met only the most

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limited intelligence, the strictest and least elevated of religions. This Judaism of the rabbis was not at all that of his dreams—the Judaism of Moses. With his natural ardor he announced his deception and vastly irritated the devout of the Synagogue. Who was this young upstart, they asked, who had submitted to the vexatious Jesuit influence and now proposed to change the Law of the ghetto? Excommunication hovered over him. In the Synagogue at Amsterdam they lighted candles veiled in black, and against this impious transgressor and scorner of sacred rites they pronounced the ancient formula of Excommunication. In all its primitive brutality, it is as follows:

“Let him be excommunicated according to
“the judgment of the Lord of Lords, in both
“tribunals, the higher and the lower. Let
“calamities fall upon him. Let his house be-

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“come the dwelling place of dragons. Let his
“star become dimmed by the clouds, and turn
“furious, terrible and cruel against him. Let
“his gold and his silver be taken from him.
“Let his wife be given to others, that they may
“live with her! May he be accursed by the
“mouth of Addirion and Achtariel, Gabriel and
“Seraphim, Raphael and Macharetieh. May he
“fall and never rise. Let him not be buried in
“the sepulchre of Israel. May he ever remain
“excommunicated, and may this act become his
“heritage. And may peace and the benediction
“of the Lord descend upon all Israel.”

And then, at the end of the ceremony, the candles were blown out to signify that the cursed one was to be forever without the light of heaven.

Those were neither idle words nor an old and ineffective form; indeed, it was a sentence to a living death and absolute isolation. Uriel en-

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dured this impossible existence for fifteen years, the victim of Jewish animosity in general and in particular of that of one of his nearest kin, a brother or a cousin. Then, exhausted, he reconciled himself with the Synagogue. But once more, very shortly afterward, he revolted against the traditional Law. Again he was excommunicated. And again he could not endure his wall of silence and solitude, but submitted to the judgment of the rabbis. He was led to the Synagogue to repent publicly. Standing on a platform and facing the crowds of men and women gathered there to hear him, he had to read aloud the detailed account of all his sins, to accuse himself of having transgressed the Sabbath and the laws of alimentation; of having denied several articles of the Faith and prevented people from becoming converted to Judaism. He then solemnly promised never again to commit the same errors and swore to be henceforth

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a good Jew. Next, he withdrew into a corner, bared himself to the waist, and on his naked shoulders received thirty-nine welts from a strap which the Jews wear on their caftan to separate the upper, or noble parts of the body from the lower, or inferior ones. Then he crouched on the ground while the sentence relieving him from excommunication was read. And finally he was laid across the threshold of the Synagogue, where the whole assembly of men and women trod upon his body as they departed.

For a man of his character and fiery Spanish pride this excessive humiliation was intolerable. He shut himself up in his house and wrote the story of his suffering, which he entitled *Specimen of a Human Life*, a violent accusation against his co-religionists. Then, this testament finished, he loaded two pistols. He fired one of them at the kinsman whose hatred had followed him for fifteen years, and whom he considered

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chiefly responsible for his misfortune. He missed him. Then, turning the other pistol on himself, he fired again—and this time did not miss.

A few years later, in this same community at Amsterdam, another child of the ghetto had to endure the fanaticism of the rabbis. His name was Spinoza. But fortunately Spinoza, who was firmer of spirit than poor Uriel Acosta, did not have that same aggressive passion. Condemned by the Synagogue, he did not struggle against it. He preferred to leave Amsterdam. First in the peace of the countryside, then at The Hague—withdrawn from his irascible race—he meditated his *Ethics*. No doubt the Jews would have caused him endless annoyance had he remained in Amsterdam, for this famous work strikes at the very heart of Israel's religion: the Divinity conceived as a person solely preoccupied by our human affairs.

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And so the great effort at intellectual emancipation, begun in the thirteenth century with Maimonides, ended in the seventeenth century, after the Renaissance and the Reform, by driving a Spinoza from the ghetto and grinding a Uriel Acosta beneath the heels of women. These Jews who had suffered so greatly to keep their intellectual integrity among foreign nations would not permit any one of their own people to have a conception different from that of the community. The persecution that Israel itself had suffered made it neither more tender nor more liberal. With inflexible severity it clung to the rites and beliefs which, in the course of its long and difficult navigation, had become incrustated in its soul like barnacles on the hull of an old ship.

IV

THE MYSTIC FLIGHT



“ . . . To confuse the true Torah with the stories that it tells is to confuse the jug with the wine it contains.”

—*Sepher-haz-Zohar*

IV

THE MYSTIC FLIGHT

I HAVE already indicated that Israel, to escape what was most bigoted and arid in its Law, followed a road apart from those rational paths trod by Maimonides and his disciples. That mystic way was the Cabbala—a strange world, a fanastic revery, a curious and fabulous novel.

There has always been in Israel an occult tradition called the Cabbala, transmitted from one initiate to another. The word itself means “tradition”—in this case, a tradition composed of arbitrary ideas borrowed from diverse countries: from Egypt, Chaldea, Babylon, Persia and Greece. There were magic, astrology, physics,

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metaphysics, medicine and chiromancy in it. It was a veritable jumble of ideas, as well as the highest introspection and the maddest fantasy.

This vast store of knowledge formed a great secret unknown to the masses. The Orient has always loved to lend a mysterious touch to what it believes to be its deepest wisdom. Even now, in Syria, one may see the Hachichins and the Druses dividing their religion into two parts: one for the commoners, one for persons of choice.

This mysterious Cabbala was kept by the Jews in numerous old scrawl-books, which were entrusted only to persons whose faces and hands revealed—by the lines in them—that they had been born to take care of these ineffable truths. Therefore it happened during Maimonides's time that one of the initiated, a Spanish Jew called Moses de Leon, combined traditional elements and his own imagination in an extraordinary book, *Sepher-haz-Zohar*, "The Book of Splen-

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dor.” But among the Jews a volume had no chance of success unless the highest antiquity recommended it. So Moses de Leon took care not to label his work as his own. He ascribed its authorship to a certain Simon ben Shetach, a famous doctor of ancient times, who was said to have dwelt thirteen years in a cave. What did he do during all that time? Moses de Leon explained it: He wrote the Zohar! During the centuries, de Leon went on to say, this marvellous book had been lost until the day a certain Namani had discovered it, near the Jordan. A violent wind storm had scattered the pages through the air, and after a miraculous trip through the heart of the hurricane the manuscript had fallen one fine morning into the courtyard of Moses de Leon’s dwelling.

It is an astounding story, but it did not in the least astonish the Jews of the thirteenth century. People had an easy faith in such exaggerations,

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and it was still easier in this case because the impostor, in order to baffle the sceptics, had taken care to write his book in old Chaldean dialect. It was an immense "hit" for the same reason that a successful novel is: it had the lure of imagination. The ghetto had no place for mystery or dreams other than its code and its formulary of prayers and rites. In this religion "The Book of Splendor" was like a torch set to dry wood. It renewed the old story about the Talmud—that when Moses descended from Mount Sinai he did not tell everything. Each word of the Bible hid a profound mystery. Each phrase had a double sense, a visible and invisible meaning, and this formidable occult sense alone deserved the attention of mankind.

"Is it believable," demands Moses de Leon through Simon ben Shetach, "that the Divinity should take the trouble to tell such dull and puerile stories as those about Agar, Esau, Laban,

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or Jacob's ass? A volume of such tales, if taken literally, would certainly not deserve the name Torah. What gives the Torah its value is its secret, mystic sense. Those Biblical stories resemble a fine coat which fools admire without considering what it covers. And yet in that coat is a body, and in that body is a soul. Woe unto the sinner who sees in the Torah only the simple tales, who thinks only of the outer apparel! Happy the wise man who seeks to lift the veil! To confuse the true Torah with the stories that it tells is to confuse the jug with the wine it contains."

Simon ben Shetach went on to explain that the letters of the Hebrew alphabet each connoted a fragment of the universe, a touch of heaven and earth. When God was merely planning the world, each of those twenty-two letters—engraved by a burin of fire in the Almighty's crown—had come down from His forehead to say,

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“Create the world with me!” And in those letters God had cut the visible and the invisible as in a piece of cloth. Wisdom and royalty, for instance, are in the upper extremity of the letter “aleph,” the first of the alphabet: millions of universes hang to its tail, and the thrones of kings cling to its forepart. The second letter, “beth,” contains the principles of the male and female, and from its substance spring unlimited births. And thus with the twenty-two letters. Now everyone knows that in the Hebrew as in the Roman alphabet, the letters are also numerals. Whoever knows their countless combinations may also have power over things sensitive and super-sensitive, including the very will of God.

There was still another marvel: the Cabbala, following Pythagoras, accepted the metempsychosis. It admitted that, at the beginning of the world, all souls were created at once, and that all

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must remain in a body for a certain length of time. If, during its sojourn on earth, a soul remains pure, after death it rejoins the spiritual kingdom. If, on the contrary, sin has sullied its first purity, reincarnation must cleanse it. Now the Messiah will not come to earth until all the souls originally created shall have passed through bodies and returned purified to heaven. Those whose wicked lives force their souls to make a new sojourn on earth, offend all humanity and delay the coming of the Messiah.

A whole colony of angels and demons unknown to ancient Judaism were brought forward to make these fairy tales credible. The immense space between heaven and earth was filled with shining seraphims whose mission was to accompany the souls ascending toward God. And the Zohar goes on to describe these soul flights, their ascension among the angels, and their arrival at the seventh heaven and the glory

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of God. Every Jewish prayer revealed a new angel of light who came to join the celestial hosts, so that even the humblest of Jews shared with the Eternal and strengthened His Power.

For all those Jews imprisoned within the letter of their Law, even more than within their ghetto, this was a prodigious novel, a wonderful adventure, a sally into the infinite. Here, at last, was an escape from the Talmud, the code of laws, the court of justice. A place to breathe freely! That Cabbala, whose metaphysics and conceptions of God and Divine activity placed it further from the Bible and the Talmud than Maimonides's philosophy, was favored by the rabbis, many of whom were delighted with it. It flattered the oriental flair for the marvellous, which the severe legislation of Moses had tried to quell, but without affecting any of those religious practices that Israel regarded so fondly. Far from weakening devotion, it stimulated it,

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since each syllable of prayer was supposed to have a definite, determined effect on a certain point of the invisible world. By purifying souls, all the commandments and traditional ceremonies hastened the happy day when the Messiah, in all his glory, would appear.

Throughout the ages, Israel has awaited the Messiah. Its entire national and religious life revolves around this one idea: the return to Jerusalem, the rebuilding of the Temple. The ghetto has always lived convinced that some day it would realize the times foretold by the prophets: justice reigning on earth, the Temple reconstructed, the twelve lost tribes brought back to the Holy City in their former power and ruling over all nations. In this astonishing dream lies the intensely poetic note of their history. One day their misfortunes will end, and from their fallen race, ill-treated beyond all others, will rise the Savior of the world! I have always been

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surprised that since the prophets Israel has never produced one of those men who, profiting by a people's anguish and hopes, moves all humanity. But that poem, without a genius to express it, is the life and dream of the ghetto.

To this stubborn hope the Cabbalists brought an element as marvellous as the hope itself. By combinations of words and letters they flattered themselves that they had discovered the date of the miracle. Dreamers bent over "The Book of Splendor," calculating with supreme confidence the day cherished through the centuries. They have announced it many times. . . . Alas, it was never the same, and the Messiah has never appeared on the day predicted. But each time that the great event has been foretold, a man has sprung up somewhere who called himself the Savior and created an atmosphere of delirious hope.

Strangely picturesque, unhappily suspended

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between heaven and earth, are the stories of these adventurers, the star-struck creatures calling themselves the Messiah. Together the stories are too long to recount, but one of them is particularly celebrated. It happened when the wise Spinoza, banished from Amsterdam, had retired to the country to escape his brother believers.

The adventurous hero who stirred the Jews to frantic enthusiasm, was worshipped as a God and even now has his secret adorers, was Sabbatai Zevi. He too was of Spanish origin. To escape persecution, his parents had taken refuge in a country which—when the greater part of the Continent was refusing to receive the Jews—welcomed them. Turkey and Holland sheltered the outlaws of Spain and Portugal, and they arrived there in droves. At Salonica, Constantinople and Smyrna they founded, as at Amsterdam, important communities which developed

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all the better because in Turkey, as in Holland, no Catholic jurisdiction checked them. Sabbatai belonged to the community at Smyrna. He was a tall fellow with superb eyes, a magnificent black beard and a melodious and literally charming voice. Early in life he disdained the games and distractions of his age and sought solitude—which, of course, attracted attention. Still more remarkable was his treatment of the two charming girls who were given to him as wives, according to the oriental custom, immediately after his fifteenth year. He preferred the Cabbala to these young ladies and pored over it night and day. Wearied by his austerity, the young wives demanded divorce. The lofty disdain of this handsome youth for them was a great sensation, and already numerous disciples began to surround this young man whose continence was so unusual to the Orient.

Presently the war between Constantinople and

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Venice broke out. Sabattai's father made quick fortune in naval supplies, since he was a ship-broker for an English firm. Personally, I do not know whether he supplied Venice or Constantinople. Both, perhaps. Be that as it may, he attributed his success to his son's merits, virtues and zeal in studying the Cabbala, and thereupon commenced to venerate him as if he were a saint. In the English firm which employed the Jewish broker there was at that time much talk of a popular English belief, according to which the year 1666 would see the beginning of the Messiah's era so much discussed in the vision of St. John. In his own home Sabattai's father hastened to emphasize the story. The coincidence of the promised date of the Messiah's coming and the predictions of the Cabbala was too striking to be overlooked by anyone who knew the Zohar. Young Sabattai persuaded himself that he was the long-looked-for Messiah,

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since he was marked by a special sign: indifference to human emotions, and to one in particular—passion.

One can estimate with some exactness the psychology of a poet or a scholar, a politician greedy for power, a Cæsar or a Bonaparte who wishes to conquer the world. But how is one to picture the mental twist of a man who thinks he is God?—and who sincerely believes it? For there seems to be no reason for doubting Sabbatai-Zevi's good faith. It is too easy to cry fraud, and insanity is out of the question, since nothing in his life permits one to consider him a madman.

Therefore, Sabbatai persuaded himself in 1648 that he was the Messiah. To prove his mission he dared to pronounce before a group of his disciples the four mystic letters which, in Hebrew, form the word "Jahve"; four letters so formidable that all Jews are forbidden to pro-

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nounce them, out of respect for the Divine Majesty.

The scandal was enormous. The rabbis of Smyrna exiled the impudent young man and his disciples from the city. But Sabbatai was unruffled. Indeed, this misfortune only fortified his ideas about his divine nature. His ancestors, formerly Marranes, had undergone more Christian influence than they themselves had suspected, and in their Judaism had flickered the idea that the Messiah should suffer. This, of course, is quite contrary to the Jewish conception.

Resolved to suffer, Sabbatai left Smyrna, followed by his disciples. But his martyrdom was short-lived. He travelled as a well-to-do tourist, not as a poor wretch. His father, who still believed in his mission, kept him going, and everywhere the young man charmed his hearers by his beauty, poise, eloquence and that chastity so

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miraculous to all Orientals. He visited Constantinople and then Salonica, where he did something worse even than to pronounce the word "Jahve": he celebrated his wedding with the Torah!

You may not know what a Jewish wedding is like. It starts when the groom puts on over his caftan the white shirt in which he expects to be carried to his grave. The bride, beside him under the marriage canopy, wears her hair unfastened and flowing over her shoulders. She walks seven times around her fiancé, who in turn places a gold ring on her finger. Both then drink from the same cup, which the bridegroom shatters in memory of long gone days of mourning and the fall of Jerusalem.

Sabattai-Zevi, son of heaven, stood beneath the marriage canopy, beside the roll containing the Torah, often called the "daughter of heaven," or "the crowned fiancée," a name

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which never was more justified than on that particular day. Seven times the "bride" was circled about him. He in turn placed the golden ring on the little wooden winding sticks. I don't quite see how both drank from the same cup, but some symbolic gesture must have replaced this time-honored custom, and Sabbatai broke the vessel in memory of those days of mourning—which, thanks to him, were soon to be no more.

After this new scandal, he was excommunicated by the rabbis of Salonica, just as he had been by those of Smyrna. He left the city and went to Greece, whence he embarked for Egypt, and at Cairo made the acquaintance of a certain Joseph Chelebi, a kind of revenue collector who was tax receiver for the Sultan. This Chelebi was also a rather odd person. A mystic and a Cabbalist, he wore a haircloth belt beneath his silken garments, fasted and practiced mortification, and rose each night to be flagellated. He

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welcomed the pretended Messiah enthusiastically, put his fortune at his disposal and it was in his palace that a most unexpected adventure befell the chaste Sabbatai. He was married—this time for good—not to a daughter of heaven, but to a daughter of earth, of flesh and bone and rare beauty. . . No doubt the reason that tempted the youth into a fourth alliance was a very good one.

Not only her beauty but her life made her worthy of her husband. During her childhood in Poland she had escaped by miracle a massacre of Jews in which her entire family seemed to have perished. Rescued by some nuns, she was brought up in the Catholic Faith, but one night she thought she heard a spirit calling—the spirit of her father, it seemed, commanding her to return to her ancestral faith.

The next day the Jews of a neighboring village

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found her in her chemise, walking up and down in the cemetery. She told them her story, adding that a divine breeze had borne her from her bed and carried her among the tombs.

The rabbi decided to send her to Amsterdam to join a brother who also had escaped the massacre. There she showed the stigmata on her body and declared that she was destined to marry the Messiah, who was soon to appear. The community at Amsterdam thought it wise to get rid of this young person, in whom Jewish and Christian mysticism were most suspiciously mixed. Sarah embarked for Leghorn, and there led a very irregular life for a while, never ceasing to insist on her supernatural mission.

At the same time, out in Cairo, in the home of his friend Chelebi, Sabbatai was informed that a Jewess of Leghorn, a rare beauty, was proclaiming herself the fiancée of the Messiah. A dream

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then told him that a young Polish maiden was some day to become his wife. . . . He immediately dispatched a messenger to Sarah.

Sarah did not have to be asked twice. She took the first boat for Cairo, and the "austere" Sabattai fell violently in love with her at first sight. The wedding was celebrated with grand pomp in the palace of Chelebi. Who was the happiest of the three? Chelebi himself, perhaps, the mysterious revenue collector who had never dreamed of the honor of seeing a God married beneath his roof.

Sarah's beauty, her eccentric manners, her influence over her husband, whose mission she encouraged daily—all added greatly to his seductive power. With his wife and disciples he began to tour through Palestine and Syria. At Gaza, a young rabbi with ingenuity, pride and even a certain literary talent, proclaimed himself Zevi's prophet. In the pompous and empty

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style that the Orient loves, he sent letters to all the communities of Europe, Asia and Africa, announcing that in one year and a few months the Messiah would reveal Himself, reduce the Sultan to His mercy, and by the power of His song along would conquer all the peoples of the world for Israel. The letters were a sensation everywhere they went, and in all the cities that he visited, including Jerusalem and Aleppo, Sabbatai aroused delirious enthusiasm. When he reached his native city, that Smyrna from which he had been driven a few years ago, his excommunication seemed to have been forgotten. He was received triumphantly. . . Only a few months remained until that much heralded year 1666, which was to usher in the era of the Messiah.

Only a few months, and yet Sabbatai hesitated to make a public declaration. At length, however, his disciples, Sarah's influence and sheer

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mass enthusiasm overcame his hesitation. To the sound of the ram's horn trumpet, on a Saturday in October, 1665, he proclaimed in the Synagogue that he was indeed the long expected Messiah. All the Jews present received his declaration with cries of "Long live our King!"—"All hail, our Messiah!" A truly collective folly evidently swept over the entire Smyrnan community. Business was neglected, and preparations commenced for the return to the Holy Land; and since, according to the Cabbala, the Messiah's era could only begin when all the souls originally created should have passed their allotted time on earth, great haste was made to marry even children of twelve years of age, that souls not yet incarnated might be given bodies and the long desired day be thus advanced.

In Smyrna this enthusiasm might have been explained by Sabattai's presence and personality, but also it ran through the ghettos of Europe

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in almost magic fashion. In France, Holland, Germany and Poland they thrilled over the new Messiah—not only the masses, but certain of the rabbis themselves, and other serious-minded people. They fasted and did penance, or they feasted and rejoiced. Banks closed, and delegates from the most distant provinces hurried to join Sabbatai, saluting him as King, and offering him their wealth. He signed his messages, “I the Lord your God, Sabbatai-Zevi!”

To proclaim himself God was one thing, but it was entirely another to convince the Sultan that there was nothing left for him to do but yield before the new King of the World. All was supposed to go without a hitch, by virtue of a magic song, just as in times gone by the walls of Jericho had fallen to the sound of a trumpet.

One day, accompanied by his wife and a great many disciples, Sabbatai set sail for Constantinople. He disembarked at the Golden Horn.

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But without giving him time to begin his magic song, the Turkish police arrested him and the Messiah entered Constantinople looking more like a prisoner in chains than the King of the World. When he was brought before the Grand Vizier, the latter slapped him. Sabbatai, appropriately recalling a certain similar scene, immediately turned the other cheek. After which he was thrown into prison, first at Constantinople and then in a castle on the Dardanelles.

The adventure did not end there, however. The Messiah's misfortunes only stimulated the ardor of the faithful. In every European community, and particularly at Amsterdam, all eyes turned toward the castle on the Dardanelles, which was called the "Turret of Power." Pilgrimages set out for that resplendent tower, held to be the tabernacle enclosing God, and in his castle at Abydos, the prisoner led the life of a

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prince. His guardians, bribed with gold, admitted the devout and widely travelled worshippers into his presence; and, impressed by his munificence and the veneration surrounding him, they were readily convinced of his divine calling.

At last the Sultan became concerned, and one day the Turkish soldiers conducted Sabbatai from his royal prison to Adrianople. There one of his co-religionists, the Sultan's doctor, came to see him in his dungeon, and announced that his master gave him the choice between death and the turban. The Messiah did not hesitate. He embraced the faith of Islam. To reward him for his prompt obedience, Mahomet XII gave him a charge in his palace, with honorable remuneration.

What a cruel blow to the ghetto! A God who abjured his faith, who donned the turban! And yet some folk still clung to their illusions. This renouncement was merely a blind, they said.

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Was not Moses himself obliged to live as an Egyptian at Pharaoh's Court? And to this day, in certain oriental communities, there are Cabalists who affirm that Sabattai-Zevi is not dead. Personally, I believe they are mistaken. At any rate, official documents say that in 1677 he died in the little port of Dulcigno, after having married a fifth time, which after all is not bad for a man who had no use for women. . .

A fantastic story. But it explains succinctly the enthusiasm, the love of the marvellous, the readiness to escape into a dream that are so characteristic of the Jewish soul; and yet are so exactly opposed to the centuries of Talmudic education, wrangling and dry and critical in spirit.

V

THE CALL OF THE OCCIDENT



“Be a Jew at home, and a man when
abroad.”

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THE Renaissance and the Reform had greatly modified some European traits, but they left the ghetto's old face practically unchanged. Eternally the same, Israel continued to live introspectively and according to its own customs, without intellectual intercourse with the outside world. By a most extraordinary paradox, it produced a Baruch Spinoza, one of the most liberal of all spirits, and yet the ghetto remained the most immovable element in all Occidental Europe. Spinoza's thought, his conception of the universe and his criticism of the holy books, were a dead letter to the ghetto. And it was a man of mediocre mental calibre,

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compared to the author of *Ethics* and the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, who a century later, renewed the tradition of Maimonides and succeeded in interesting a small group of his co-religionists in occidental ideas.

Moses Mendelssohn was an immaculate product of the ghetto. Born in Southern Germany of a poor family at Dessau, he was naturally unattractive—at least, in a physical sense. Small, clumsy and deformed, he seemed hardly fit to better his fellow Jews. His childhood was that of thousands of other Jewish children—even today—in Oriental Europe; his only education was in the Law and its commentaries. Every other subject was strictly forbidden—science, literature, geography and history were so many vanities, or rather so many horrible impieties. From morning until night, swaying backward and forward, these children continually mutter

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Bible verses which the schoolmaster writes in Hebrew characters on their wooden slates.

It is not rare, in the Russian and Polish ghettos, to meet children ten and twelve years of age who can recite the five Books of Moses from beginning to end, without understanding a word of them. And as those five books contain five thousand six hundred and forty-eight verses, you can imagine the number of days passed in a sordid school-room beneath the master's ferrule, mumbling the lines of the Torah, from seven o'clock in the morning until seven or eight o'clock at night.

This forced and entirely mechanical recitation is the only intellectual work of early childhood. The more gifted boys then pass on from the Talmud-Torah, or elementary school, to what is called the Yechiba, or Talmudic school. In our *Shadow of the Cross* we have tried to suggest the

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Talmud-Torah, and in *Rose of Sharon* to portray a Jewish adolescence and the strange life of the Yechibas. We have shown these sacred sheds open to the four winds of heaven where a little herd of students chew and ruminate upon the problems which for centuries have been Israel's mental fodder. We have given a few examples of these odd archaic lessons, whose subtlety sometimes approaches absurdity, but where the Jewish spirit awakens, and reasoning whets itself. In short, they have shaped the intelligence of Israel, so clever at seizing and utilizing ideas, capable of going so far once the scholastic yoke is shaken off. Until his fifteenth year, Moses Mendelssohn led this life in the Yechibas, with its enthusiasms, wretchedness, barrenness and hidden forces. Then, one day, his rabbi professor having been called to Berlin, he conceived the idea of joining him there to continue his studies.

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It was not as easy as it sounds. Berlin was forbidden to all Jews who could not prove their self-support. Mendelssohn had only his prayer bag, taliss, philacteries and a few pious books. One can imagine him parleying with the guards at the Brandebourg door, though how he managed to convince them is a mystery. But could a Talmudic student, a flower of Israel, as they are called, allow the first Prussian sergeant he encountered to hinder his first steps in life? . . .

Forty years later, this same boy who had struggled with the guard (in heaven only knows what language) had become what is popularly known to-day as a great European; in other words, a mind completely without all overly individual nationalism; and when he died, the people of Berlin proposed a statue in his memory, in the Operaplatz and beside the Leibnitz monument. His was an astounding success, well called "Mendolssohn's miracle."

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It is not that he was a genius, or even a great writer. He always wrote rather mediocre German, and even poor Hebrew, if I may take the word of those who are supposed to know. And he was not a deep thinker, although in a contest at the Berlin Academy he won against Kant. But an academic degree does not signify genius in any country, and above all it was Mendelssohn's personal charm, the dignity of his life and his interest in all that aroused the intelligent men of his time, that won a place for him. He held his own in that little world, so very cultured and international, which stretches from the Seine to the Spree and even to the Neva, and which is, properly speaking, the world of the Encyclopedia. He shared in the spirit of that eighteenth century society which was much less confined than ours—within the limits of its natural particularisms. He was the peer of all the clear-minded men of his time. In token of his esteem,

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Kant publicly embraced him; Lessing was his friend, and in *Nathan, the Sage*, wherein he painted the ideal philosopher, it was Mendelssohn whom he had in mind.

However, despite all this, Moses Mendelssohn was barely tolerated in Berlin. He lived steadily without civic rights in the heart of a society which nevertheless recognized his talents. Yet, however celebrated he was, the only civil right he could ever obtain was the title of *Schutz Jude*—a protected Jew, a Jew of the Crown, a Jew who belonged to the King and was at the King's service. However, with merely this minimum of freedom, he had fully achieved intellectual liberty; he had entered the republic of spirits that were cultivated society.

He was the first to show that one might be a good Jew and a good European, which makes him a prominent figure in Jewish history—one might even say in modern civilization, too, in

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the measure of Israel's contribution to that civilization.

All his life he was faithful to Judaism. In a celebrated reply to one of his Catholic friends, who wished to prove to him that his spiritualistic philosophy must necessarily lead to the Christian faith, and who urged him to become converted, he publicly declared that he considered Judaism in its original purity to be superior to Christianity.

"I do not recognize any other eternal truths," he writes, "save those which may be not only easily conceived, but also established and averred by human reason. Only a false notion of Judaism might make one suppose that I should turn aside from the religion of my fathers in order to advance such an opinion; I consider that, on the contrary, it is essential to Judaism, and that in it is precisely the principal difference which separates it from Christianity. In a word, the Jews,

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according to my belief, know nothing of the 'revealed religion,' in which the Christians understand these words; what they possess is a 'revealed legislation.' They have laws and ordinances, commandments and precepts and teachings in accordance with the Divine Will. All these instruct them how to conduct themselves if they wish to obtain happiness in this world and the next. But they have no dogma, no articles of faith, no fundamental truths. Moreover, the Hebrew word which is usually translated as 'faith' more often merely means confidence, assurance and peaceful hope for the accomplishment of promises given."

Judaism, as he understood it, was a purified Judaism, relieved of the many archaic practices which made the Jew's life so extravagant, prodigiously complicated and impossible in modern times. And that Judaism, reduced to the great fundamentals of Moses, ought not to hamper the

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Jew in his daily life. Outside his home and the synagogue, where his piety was his own affair, he should be a man like other men, with a natural share of his own in the common civilization.

This was Mendelssohn's argument; without renouncing his faith, he was the first modern Jew to get in touch with his times and the society in which he lived; and he did more than anyone else to transform Israel. Since he considered Judaism pre-eminently a simple religious confession, the first blow at a Hebrew nationality was thus dealt by a Jew.

But perhaps his own writings were less influential than one of his translations. He had the astonishing audacity—astonishing to the rabbis, at least—to translate the Bible into German. He did it for his children. One Solomon Dubno, having heard about the manuscript destined for private family use, asked permission to publish it for the benefit of Jewish youth.

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Luther had long since made a similar translation, but no Jew, of course, would ever have dreamed of reading a translation made by a Christian. One made by a fellow believer shocked them less. Mendelssohn's work was read; and in a foreign language the venerable book, as old as Israel itself, and built out of its very soul, brought into the ghetto some surprising novelties quite contrary to its intellectual essence. I have already said that almost all Jews in Germany were ignorant of the German language. They spoke only their Yiddish patois, to which a very few added a smattering of Hebrew. Mendelssohn's translation gave the youth, who so desired, a chance to learn that tongue. Innumerable students in Poland and Russia learned German by comparing the Hebrew text with the translation; and, of course, let their rabbis know nothing at all about it. It was their prison key, their deliverance, their

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escape from narrowly encircling studies. It was, finally, their communication with the outside world. No wonder that the rabbis were scandalized. "Is the Torah," they asked, "nothing then but a servant for propagating the German language?" And they violently insulted the translator who had opened to their students the door of a forbidden universe.

This intellectual revolution in the ghetto, whose point of departure was Mendelssohn's Bible, slowly developed its effects, and gradually becomes linked with Judaism in the nineteenth century. I shall return to this phase later. But the philosopher had hardly died when a disgust for Judaism—which would greatly have surprised him—broke out in Berlin among his own disciples. As in Maimonides's time, his friends and even his children were unlike him in that they had not cherished deep in their hearts memories of a childhood nourished on Hebrew

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tradition. They hastily abandoned numerous feelings, thoughts and customs to which that former student in a Dessau Yechiba had remained faithful.

For them enlightenment did not mean the recovery of the pure spirit of the Bible from beneath its encumbering commentaries. To be a good Jew at home, and a good German abroad, was to rid one's heart and mind of all that was specifically Jewish, of all that might distinguish a Jew from a Christian. It was, in brief, to renounce Israel.

The centre for this disavowal of Israel by itself was the salon of a beautiful and intelligent Jewess of Spanish origin whose name was Henrietta Hertz. And I may note here that in Jewish society it is usually the women who are eager to seek out the Christians. The reason, I believe, is that the Jewish faith, like all oriental

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religions, cares little about the place of women. A woman's prayer isn't supposed to interest the Eternal Father. She may go into the Synagogue, but custom rules that she shall go there as seldom as possible. She is left to ritual practices that are important to Jewish life, but which nevertheless are essentially domestic: cooking, bathing and clothing, in which the intellect plays no overwhelming rôle. It is notable that whenever circumstances lead a Jewish woman outside her circle, where her activity is regulated by a thousand narrow laws, she immediately goes adrift. No more rites or rules, no true religious feeling to replace them. . . . A Jewess who leaves the ghetto is an empty mould receptive to whatever life and her natural curiosity may bring her.

In the Near East I have seen some singular examples of how little the Jews care about the religious education of their daughters. There Israelite families, and even the families of the

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miraculous rabbis, often have their daughters educated in Catholic convents. There they can learn French, English, and German, and study the piano. Then, at fifteen or sixteen years of age, they are withdrawn and are married off to one of their co-religionists who speaks only Yiddish, and wears the caftan and the ritual ringlets. I leave you to imagine the strange situation: the bride brought up by pious nuns, the bridegroom formed by the Talmud. Sometimes divorce ends this ill-made union. Sometimes the young wife, in real despair, plunges back into that curious existence to which she was no longer accustomed. And sometimes (this is frequently the case) she succeeds in weaning her husband from the Jewish belief.

Henrietta Hertz is a fine example of the emancipated Jewess. Her friends, thinking of her noble carriage and aristocratic features, called her the Tragic Muse. But she was tragic in ap-

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pearance alone, since she was personally pleasing. All Berlin's intelligentsia frequented her drawing-room, the first place in the world where Christians and Jews met on an equal footing, several years before the French Revolution and the emancipation of Israel.

It was at the very beginning of German romanticism, when Goethe's pagan philosophy was meant to replace the "antique" moral system of Jehovah. In order to conform to the poet's principle that "a well-filled life is that which best appreciates the lyric sentiments of poetry," a group of men and women—all *habitués* of Henrietta Hertz's salon—founded the League of Virtue, which was virtuous in name alone. There everyone thee-and-thoued everyone else, and sentimental attraction between the sexes was expressed in "Elective Affinities." Very shortly the League of Virtue stood for nothing but divorce and free love. Another result (most un-

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expected, for it contradicted Goethe's paganism) was the baptism of most of the Jews who frequented Henrietta's home. She herself became converted. Mendelssohn's two daughters and eldest son renounced their faith. The philosopher's disciples cast Judaism aside, as well as everything else that reminded them of an existence they now abhorred.

How difficult it is to touch, and not destroy, that religion of Israel which, according to Mendelssohn's own apt expression, is less a "revealed religion" than a "revealed legislation"! Among so many minute commandments regulating everything in Jewish daily life, from the gravest things to the most futile, who would dare to choose? Are they not all of equal value to the Eternal Father? And if not to Him, surely they are to the pious rabbis. To boil milk in a dish in which meat has been cooked, clothe oneself in material of mixed wool and cotton, carry

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anything in one's hands on a Saturday or fail in many other ways to observe such incomprehensible laws, is quite as serious as the gravest attack on the moral teachings of Moses. Whoever commits these sins ceases to be a good Jew, and ostracizes himself from the community of Israel. An emancipated Jew, then, must take extreme resolutions. Of the six hundred and thirteen commandments which theoretically regulate his life, at least six hundred appear absurd to him. He casts them aside as a useless burden, just as he abandons his caftan and his curls. What then remains of his former religion is only a vague deism having nothing in common with the Law of Israel, and ending more often than not in an absolute indifference.

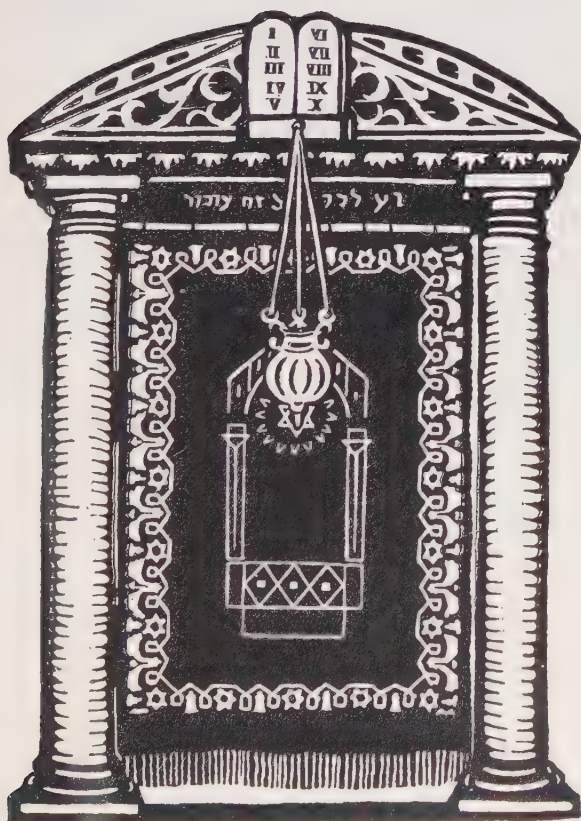
The rabbis have always been aware of this. In order to observe Judaism to the letter, the tribe must be grouped and made to live in a community, in that very special atmosphere and

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amid the conditions that created and preserved the ghetto. As soon as the ghetto is done away with, it becomes almost impossible to follow the rule of the Talmud, to submit to that highly specialized existence with its minute and endless obligations. One may counter by saying that the Jewish religion is not entirely confined to the Talmud. This is doubtless true. But the Talmud has ordered that religion as the Popes and the Councils ordered the Catholic faith. And experience proves that once the ghetto is destroyed, its religion follows suit. Hence the end of the eighteenth century found ghetto life in greater danger than it had ever known before. And this time the threat was not persecution, but something more formidable. It was liberty.

VI

LIBERTY



“When God made the world, He created but a single man, so that no other might say, ‘I am of more noble race than thou.’ ”

—*Sanhedrin*

VI

LIBERTY

HENRIETTA HERTZ'S salon influenced the emancipation of Israel. Three years before the French Revolution, Mirabeau went on a secret mission to Berlin. Mendelssohn had just died, but his memory was still very much alive in Berlin society. Mirabeau was told of the philosopher's efforts to enlighten his fellow believers and, as the saying then went, "Help the light of reason penetrate the shadows of archaic Judaism." He frequented Henrietta's drawing-room, then at its height, and was astonished to find Jews there who differed not at all from the rest of polished society. The discovery interested him in a question which, if he

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had remained in France, probably would never have occurred to him.

On his return to Paris he wrote a pamphlet entitled *Moses Mendelssohn and the Political Reform of the Jews*. "Do you wish the Jews, he said, "to become better men and useful citizens? Then banish from society all the distinctions that degrade them. Open all means of subsistence and acquisition to them. . . See to it," he continues, in a slightly amusing style, "that without neglecting their fathers' sacred doctrine, they may learn to know more of nature and her author, morality and reason, the principles of order, the interests of human kind and the big society of which they are a part." And a few months later, in the *Assemblée Constituante*, Mirabeau defended these ideas with his accustomed vigor.

However, the Assembly had difficulty in granting civil rights to the Jews. The question came

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before the tribune quite often under various forms, but as no agreement was reached, it was eluded each time. Step by step, supporters of Israel—Mirabeau, Abbé Gregoire, Castellane, Regnault and St. Jean d'Angely—reaped a partial success. But it was only two days before adjournment that the Assemblée Constituante legally abolished all distinctions between the Jews and other citizens.

This vote was potentially more important than even its immediate effect. The ghetto ceased to exist for approximately fifty thousand Jews then living in France. But fifty thousand Jews were few beside the ten or twelve millions outside France who continued under the laws of exception. And even in France, particularly in Alsace and the Rhone valley, their vote and rights were restricted by Napoleon, who had little sympathy for the race. Nevertheless, wherever Napoleon's armies went the Jews were de-

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livered from their ancestral servitude, and despite the Emperor's mistrust, they very justly considered him a liberating hero. See Heinrich Heine's poems.

Waterloo was for them a racial castastrophe. In countries where the French had brought them liberty, everything now conspired to throw them back into old conditions. The conquerors hated France and all the new ideas she had introduced into Europe in the preceding twenty years. The emancipation of the Jews was one of those innovations. The supporters of the Holy Alliance thought the Christian idea the only force that could bar the road to revolutionary thought, and this opinion hardly favored Israel. Finally, romanticism—German romanticism, especially, which was now disgusted with Goethe's paganism—developed an enthusiastic notion about the Middle Ages. So enthusiastic, indeed, that certain important romanticists (even Schlegel)

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clamored for the re-establishment of the Inquisition in Germany. The ghettos at Cologne, Frankfort, Lubeck, Mannheim and Berlin, whose chains the French soldiers had rent asunder, once again became prisons. Once again, too, the Jews had to pay toll each time they crossed a bridge or entered a city. Soon the number of their marriages was limited to prevent their multiplying in excess. . . . The list of restrictions continued indefinitely.

France alone, under Charles X and the Ultras, maintained completely the principle of equal rights for Jews, the principle that France had been the first to inaugurate. It had been recognized and signed by Louis XVI. Louis XVIII honored his brother's signature by suppressing the restrictions in Jewish Alsace which Napoleon had considered temporarily necessary.

A febrile impatience seized all enlightened Jews. One must understand their state of mind.

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Ever since the vote of the Assemblée, they had believed that liberty was no longer inaccessible to them. They had enjoyed it for an instant and they looked back on it with nostalgia. They knew very well the causes of the reaction from which they suffered, and they were aware that the principal one was disgust for the liberal ideas advanced by the French. But this recrudescence of the old antipathy felt by governments and peoples was, they charged, the fault of the Jews themselves. In Germany, above all, the disciples of Mendelssohn who had frequented Henrietta Hertz's salon were particularly irritated that the Jewish masses did nothing to bring them nearer to the occidental world; and that by their strange manners, their obstinate self-exile, and all those faults with which the Jews of Mendelssohn's time were reproached, they partially justified the legislation that kept them at a distance. Those faults included superstition, stu-

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pidity, lack of education and of moral sense, incapacity at cultivating the arts, sciences and useful professions, inaptitude for military or civil service and an invincible propensity to fraud, usury and anarchy. The enlightened were shocked by the uncouth liberties taken with the Eternal Father inside the Synagogues.

More delicate minds, ambitious to rid Judaism of the fetters of time, desired the cult itself to be polished, given a more decent and peaceful aspect, and relieved of that savage air that made Alexander II exclaim, on entering a Synagogue, "Why, this is a madhouse!"

During the first half of the nineteenth century the Jewish intellectuals in Germany made a violent effort to modernize their religion. It was a curious moment in Israel's history, an event comparable within Judaism to Luther's accomplishment within Christianity. At Hamburg, Berlin, Munich and Vienna, societies were formed to

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start a kind of Jewish reform. These progressives took up the Bible and made a point of distinguishing mere circumstantial fact from what is of divine or eternal character. They joyfully cast aside anything that might prevent them from living a life like everybody else.

The religious programmes surprisingly set aside the Talmud, suppressed circumcision, regulations for food and fasting and the observance of the Sabbath. Even the old belief in the Messiah was willingly relegated to the attics of their minds, along with other cobwebs. In brief, a new cult was built piece by piece: a refined, well-bred cult, with touches of both Catholicism and Protestantism, neither of which had much in common with the religion of the ghetto. Jewish tradition never endured such an attack—and this attack was led by the Jews themselves, together with the Modernist Rabbis. But what profoundly differentiates this spiritual move-

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ment from Luther's reform, to which I compared it, is that—quite contrary to what happened in the Catholic Church during the sixteenth century—the Jewish masses resisted. They did not follow their leaders. In spite of all efforts, they remained faithful to their belief and traditional cult. And what had happened to those who frequented Henrietta Hertz's salon also happened to the reformers. Their courage broke down before the obstinate resistance of their co-religionists and their own difficulties. More often than not their weariness declared itself by a final disgust for their own race and by their abandonment of Judaism. Never since the days of the Marranes had so many Jews become converted to Catholicism and Protestantism. But the Marranes had given in under compulsion, whereas no one constrained these new converts. In trying so hard to purify the religion of Moses, they had managed to make the Synagogue so like

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a temple or a church that it was merely a step to abandon it. There were still many who, like Heinrich Heine, cherished a heartfelt fidelity to Judaism (an historical, poetic and sentimental Judaism), but even these were baptized because they lacked the courage to mix with the masses of their co-religionists who remained attached to ancient practices. They could not suffer with them the vexations that only a true faith or a venerable custom permitted one to disdain.

The Jewish Reform was a failure. The emancipation of the ghetto did not follow an inner revolution in the religion and the cult. It was brought about by another means, and once again it was France that offered a solution to the problem that Israel could not solve for itself. The revolution of 1848 finished the work begun by the Assemblée Constituante. Liberal ideas once more came to the fore. Germany, Eng-

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land, Austria and Italy successively decided to give the Jews the rights France had given them a half century before. Christian society was kinder to them than the enlightened Jews themselves had been. The latter, in their desire to achieve their liberty with all speed, were ready to make light of the religion itself. They demanded that the ghetto reform at once, that the Jews become like everyone else if they were to enjoy the rights of all. European society was more liberal than they were. It did not ask Israel to sacrifice its beliefs. It simply counted on time and liberty to efface differences in thought and feeling which for twenty centuries have separated the Christians from the Jews.

VII

THE RESISTANCE OF THE ORIENT



“The glory of God is to be found only
where Joy reigns.”

“The flame alone rises, the ashes fall.”
—*Proverbs of the Hassidim*

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AT THE very moment when Mendelssohn was trying so hard to modernize Israel, and smooth over its relations with the occidental mind, an exact counter-movement swept the Jewish masses farther from Christian society than they had ever been before. And this purely mystic movement did not emanate from an exclusive circle, like that of Henrietta Hertz, but from the very heart of the Jewish world, in the massed populations of Oriental Europe.

Out there in Poland and Little Russia dwelt several million Jews, who then, as now, formed Israel's vast reserve forces. The first immigrants had come from Germany during the four-

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teenth century, after the great exodus which followed the black pest, for which the Jews were blamed. The Polish nobility welcomed them cordially. In a country consisting of only the nobility and the serfs these immigrants formed a middle class of all sorts of dealers, commissaries and intermediaries. They even succeeded in forming a kind of nation, governed by an assembly of rabbis: the synod of four countries—Poland, Little Poland, Little Russia and Lithuania. As formerly in Spain, they spoke the common language and dressed in the Polish fashion: some of them even wore the sword and the gold chain about their necks. Each community had a religious council which administered its affairs and employed a Yechiba to instruct its youth. The liberal rabbis put aside the refinements fashionable among German Yechibas, and made a place in their curriculum for the study of medicine, philosophy and as-

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tronomy. An intense and purely Jewish intellectual life began to dominate these little "Kingdoms of God;" and then, as aforetime in Judea and Babylon, one found simple citizens quite as interested as the rabbis in the Sacred Science, dividing their lives between their trades and a meditative existence ever facing the Eternal.

But with the seventeenth century, everything changed. During the Thirty Years' War, a crowd of Jews from Germany took refuge in Poland, bringing with them their bigotry and their Yiddish, an old Suabian and Franconian patois into which practical modern life had introduced a great many Hebrew words. Influenced by the newcomers, the spiritual aspect of the communities was dimmed. At the same time, Polish political conditions changed very unhappily for the Jews. Royalty, which had protected them, steadily lost prestige. The ruling lords, whom the king's authority no longer

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controlled, began to demand more and more from their serfs. To satisfy their needs the Jewish intendants oppressed the people: and the people, of course, began to hate them. The Jesuits, who had settled in the country to combat the Reform, naturally considered the Jews enemies, and did nothing to make their life more pleasant.

For these and other reasons, hate accumulated against the Israelite communities. One day the storm broke and for several years the tribes of the hetman Chmielnicki devastated Poland and Ukrainia, slaughtering everything in their road. If one accepts the chronicles, some three hundred thousand Jews were killed, three hundred communities were wiped out, and four hundred others were destroyed. Most of the Yechibas went down in the tempest. Material and moral misery ensued: the artisans had all they could do to live without bothering about

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Talmudic studies. The rabbis were neglected and, abandoned, lost their greatness of spirit, and took interest only in futile discussions, lifeless problems and the “pilpouls” in style among their German colleagues. Their influence over the faithful was limited to frightening them by descriptions of the tortures reserved for the sinners who disobeyed the least commandment of the Torah. Left to themselves, the ignorant and wretched masses turned to the sorcerers. The Cabbala had always furnished them all kinds of opportunities. And now there were, as usual, ascetics who preached abstinence to hasten the coming of the Messiah, and libertines who, in the name of the Messiah, cast aside all the commandments of the Torah, as well as the simplest morality.

Then there appeared a man who successfully reconciled these contradictory tendencies, and gave the masses the mental food they awaited.

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He was known as Bal-chem-tov, Becht by abbreviation, "the man of good renown." There are few exact details about him, but many legends that were put into a book which appeared after his death. It is entitled *The Praises of Becht*, and many Jews still read it as an exemplary work. As far as our history is concerned, it is quite as interesting as a truthful record, because it tells at the same time the character of Becht's mission and of the state of mind of a race which has been unceasingly enthusiastic about him.

One may read there that Becht's father, who lived in Wallachia, was driven from his village during the war and led into servitude in an unknown foreign land. There, quite naturally (here the legend follows a familiar Jewish inclination) this slave, more intelligent than anyone else, was notable for his wit. And like a new Joseph or Moses, he became the confidant and

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Grand Vizier of the King. After countless vicissitudes, and at one hundred years of age, he returned to his own country with just the time and strength to beget a child destined to the highest fortune. After his birth, both his father and mother were gathered to Abraham's bosom, having accomplished their destiny.

Like all children of the village, the little orphan, when four years of age, was sent to the "heder," or kindergarten. But almost immediately he neglected his studies for dreams, left his slate and schoolmaster, and retired to the woods. This extraordinary trait was certainly not an invention, for this dislike of study and love of nature are two sentiments exactly contrary to the spirit of the ghetto.

All his life Becht vanished that way into the woods. I mean to say, he broke away from the habits of his environment, and always turned from study, preferring introspection and the de-

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sire to discover God in His creations and in the poetry of the world. Nevertheless, legend says that he was a learned Talmudist (for how can one imagine a Jewish life without the Talmud?). Yes, strangely enough, he devoted himself to preaching that science that was the ghetto's pride. Having dreamed that he would marry the daughter of a famous rabbi, he wished to show the latter what a famous Talmudist he really was. The rabbi, completely dazzled, promised him his daughter, but Becht demanded that in the betrothal ceremony it should not be mentioned that he himself was a rabbi. Now it happened that on the very day the father was returning home to tell his daughter that he had found her a husband, he fell dead upon the high-road. The contract that he had made with Becht was found among his papers. . . . Well, there was a stir in the family when they discovered that the rabbi had affianced his daughter

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to a nobody, a man without title or position. The astonishment was still greater when the fiancé presented himself. His simplicity surpassed all imagination. The marriage, however, was celebrated according to the wishes of the deceased, but almost at once the bride's family drove the young couple from their hearth. And then, as in times gone by, when the pupil had deserted school for the woods, Becht and his wife withdrew into the forest. . .

I conclude my yarn here. I have said enough, I presume, to show the hidden meaning in the legend. Neither intelligence nor study is the greatest possession in this world. Simplicity of heart is far more preferable. That is the position toward which Bolchem pointed the ghetto. With a deep feeling for what satisfies the soul, he made a choice from among those many reveries which, borrowed from the Cabala, floated above the havoc-ridden communi-

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ties. Unlike the ascetics who followed in the wake of Luria, the Cabbalist, he did not proclaim that God could only be reached by fasting, abstinence and sadness; nor, like the orthodox rabbis, that it was enough for a pious man to reason upon old texts; nor, like the libertines, that God was to be found only in debauchery and sensual excitement. . . . No, he borrowed a little from each of them. He did not touch upon the rabbinical tradition: he accepted all its rites and commandments. But the exclusive study of the Talmud seemed to him inspired by the bad angel of Israel. From Luria's Cabbala he took the belief that by simple prayer and the gift of his heart, man may influence God Himself. But he did not believe with him that to remain in communion with God one must quit the world, renounce its pleasures, pains and loves. He condemned the libertines and their gross desires, but he thought kindly toward this earth. His

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joy was that of a heart overflowing with divine love, pity and friendship for mankind.

This religion of tenderness, hope and joy fell like a gentle dew on the despairing heart of the ghetto. It took Bolchem little time to assemble some ten thousand faithful followers. Hassidims, "the pious," as they were called, were distinguished from the rest of their tribe by the long curls hanging about their cheeks and by their mode of prayer, which consisted of raising the voice very high and swinging the body frantically back and forth (like the dervishes) to obtain ecstasy more rapidly. Very soon the sect had grown from ten to a hundred thousand disciples. People turned toward Becht as they had turned toward Moses de Leon: to satisfy the powerful mystic need at the very bottom of the human soul. Bolchem had created a new mental climate, the passionately warm temperature of the oriental communities of to-day . . .

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I must be forgiven here for having repeated what I have already said in our *Kingdom of God*, but how can the same things be said in two entirely different ways?

They rejoiced greatly over this Becht, who announced that the Eternal Father liked nothing better than joy, light and Saturday feasting. An unlimited familiarity replaced the sacred terror of the orthodox religion, which placed between God and Israel the insuperable distance between heaven and earth. People began to pray by swinging their bodies and making noises with their fingers like the joyous sound of the castanets, the better to excite enthusiasm. In the Synagogues one might drink, smoke and discuss one's affairs, for it is only idolaters who are disturbed in their temples by the presence of the idols that encumber them. Thank God there were no idols in the house of Jehovah! Doubtless the Holy Torah is there in its cupboard, be-

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hind the velvet curtain embroidered with the two books of Juda. But David danced before the Ark, did he not? And how could the Holy Torah possibly be offended that the Jews to whom God gave it should carry on a familiar conversation in its presence?

And once prayers are over, how can it shock the Eternal Father if one drinks a little glass of brandy or macerates a stalk of celery? And what harm if one eats a bit of spiced bread to accompany the beverage, since the little glass and the wine are each an occasion to pronounce a new benediction in honor of the Master of the World? Why, in the same way, should tobacco smoke be less agreeable to the Lord than myrrh and incense? If smoking is allowed in the Synagogue, is it not because the spirit may then better receive profound truths and more easily picture their dazzling splendor? If one becomes delightfully inebriated each Saturday in

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this holy spot where the Sabbath feast is celebrated, it is only to reach ecstasy more quickly and thus penetrate the depths of heaven. And if one finally falls asleep there at night, as at an inn, it is only that the Lord may have one's last thought at night and his first in the morning. . .

Nothing could be further from the ideas of Mendelssohn, the salon of Henrietta Hertz and the Berlin reformers than all this. Following the example of their master, the Hassadims willingly neglected the study of the Talmud for a book more flattering to their imagination—the Zohor, “The Book of Splendor.” Their flair for its hidden and therefore mysterious sense, for its demons and angels and suggestions for direct contact with divinity—when all these factors were added, it was not only in the Cabbalistic works that the Hassadims delved for secrets of this life and the next.

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The new religion put the miracle within their reach. Bolchem possessed miraculous powers, he was an intermediary between heaven and earth; and his successors, the Zadicks, continued to transmit this supernatural power from one to another.

The Zadicks (there are four of them in Oriental Europe) are the all-powerful interlocutors with the Divine Presence. Each year thousands of pilgrims go to them from all corners of Little Russia and Poland. They bring them money and surround them with veneration. An anecdote, which I heard while I was out there, shows—despite its irreverence—the blind faith placed in them by their disciples, I had almost said their adorers.

One day a miraculous rabbi, while walking with one of the faithful, saw at the foot of a high wall a wicked Jew eating pork. At this sight the disciple cried out, “Let the wall fall

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upon this transgressor who is eating forbidden flesh!”

To which the Zadick replied, “My son, let us be more indulgent than that. On the contrary, I shall pray for the wall not to fall.” And the wall did not move. The faithful one pronounced this a miracle, and everyone agreed with him.

This Hassadim religion is still that of several million Jews in Eastern Europe. The enthusiasm aroused by Bolchem has not yet died out. Millions of Jews still piously believe in the miraculous rabbis. Out there they are still expecting (perhaps He will come to-day or to-morrow!) that Messiah whom the enlightened of 1840 sought to drive from their “antique” religion. In the Bethramidrasch, or the rooms for pious reading that are annexed to the Synagogues, I myself have counted as many Zohars as Talmuds, and I have seen old men, youths and

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even children spend whole evenings, candle in hand, poring over these Cabbalistic scrawl books.

And yet the modern spirit, with all its temptations and its terrible penchant for uprooting the strongest traditions, has penetrated even among the Hassadims. By what circuitous ways and cunning, it is hard to say. To understand them one must know something about Oriental Europe's ghetto life, a difficult task unless one has actually visited the country. But one may step on the magic rug of the oriental fairy tales. It conquers all distance and by miracle takes one wherever he may wish to go. This is indeed the way to reach the land of the miraculous rabbis.

VIII

UNEASINESS IN THE GHETTO



Rise, oh my people, ye have slept
enough—

Rise up, and open your eyes.

What misfortune has befallen you,

That ye should sleep thus until noon?

The sun is long up o'er the world

And all men are about.

Ye alone, your eyes closed, your body
bent in twain, remain abed.

—*Michael Gordon*

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THEN here you are at Lemberg, Cracovia, Berdichef, Vilna or in one of those little villages not on the map, but in which Israel founders in the mud of winter, rolls in the summer dust. Truly, a strange world . . . so strange that a description of it seems hardly credible. Although what one sees is surprising, there is all that one does not see, does not know, can not guess—and all this reveals itself as even more astonishing than you had imagined, if by chance you are able to penetrate deeper into this private universe.

Misery first strikes your eye—misery which, here, is not individual, but rather a general state,

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a natural condition of life. By common principle, all these people carry on small trades of some kind: they are artisans or shop-keepers, but unfortunately there are as many shops as customers—which is hardly good for business. But besides his chosen trade, each one does something else to improve his way of living, for the very reason that it is not a profession: he may be an intermediary in marriages, intermediary in commerce, beadle, lay-clerk in the Synagogue, alms collector, beggar (for begging is a respectable profession). Twenty other similar occupations, more or less defined, earn but a penny. But in them the Jew is infinitely more active and ingenious than he would have to be in any regular profession. Which explains what one feels in these villages: an impression of extreme agitation . . . much ado about nothing. This has been admirably set forth in an ironic yet tender fashion by a kind of Jewish Dickens, the

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novelist Abranovitch, who, in his Yiddish jargon, has painted inimitably the virtues and absurdities, the oddities and miseries of the ghetto.

“If, for example,” he writes, “you should brusquely ask a Jew whom you see apparently preoccupied on the market place, how and by what means he earns his living, he would remain perplexed for a moment, and would hardly know what to answer. But after having stirred up his memory, he will say to you naïvely, ‘I? How do I earn my living? Why, there is a God who never abandons His creatures. He gives them their living and probably will continue to do so in the future. That’s all I have to say.’ ‘But tell me, what do you do? Have you a trade? Do you possess a means of earning your livelihood?’ ‘May His Holy Name be praised! Such as I am, I possess a talent, thanks to the Master of the World, a most precious gift, a beautiful voice. On fête days I sing in the

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Synagogue on the outskirts of the city. I am also a "mohel," circumciser, and am unrivalled in the art of pricking the unleavened bread. From time to time I am an intermediary in marriages. Now (and this is strictly between ourselves) I peddle a little spirituous liquor, which puts the butter on my bread. I own a goat who gives sufficient milk, and I have not far from our city a rich relation who, when times are hard, allows himself to be called upon. Beyond that, I repeat again, God is a Father. God is a Father.' " ¹

You know this Jew from the ghetto. You have seen him . . . in the movies. He is Charlie Chaplin. Charles Chaplin is a Jew and all the traits of his humor bear the Jewish stamp. Try to recall "The Gold Rush," a diverting film in itself, but a most admirable one if one sees in

¹ Quoted from Pines, whose splendid book on Yiddish literature has been most useful to us.

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it what, to my mind, is a splendid memory of the ghetto, whether Chaplin has willed it or not. It is the story of a "Schlemil." The Schlemil in the ghetto is the awkward, unlucky fellow whose bread always falls buttered side down; the fellow about whom one says, if he is an undertaker, that men have stopped dying; or again, if he is a candle monger, that night never comes. But this Schlemil is nevertheless a Jew, and many a time his Jewish awkwardness ends by conquering obstacles before which all the efforts of another man may have failed. . .

Charlie approaches, with his long flat feet and famous little round hat which never leaves his head (no Jew ever uncovers). He thrusts that hat on his pate with Israel's familiar gesture, centuries old. Where is he going in the snow? Where do you suppose he is bound? For the conquest of gold . . . out into a dreadful, unknown country, amid a thousand perils against

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which his roguishness is his only defence. So feeble in appearance, so slim and fragile and supple, he is the very symbol of Israel's force. Has he a fur coat, a sleigh, a tent like all the other gold seekers? How would he have acquired them? For whom do you take him? First of all, he is penniless; and then, why be bothered by them? Is it necessary to think of future difficulties? If a fur coat is necessary to do this, one would never undertake anything. What is the use of being a Jew if Jehovah is not there to take care of you? The proof: a bear appears on the scene. He is about to devour our man. But not at all. The Lord is there, who says to the ferocious beast, "Thou shalt not eat my Jew." And the animal disappears as it came!

Recall, if you can, the tempest-wracked hut where he is about to die of hunger. Die? Never! He has been hungry before. . . He

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has been hungry for centuries. He knows all the ghetto's wiles for deceiving his famished stomach. I am quite certain that it was not Charlie Chaplin who invented the way to make soup out of an old shoe, or to suck nails as if they were marrow bones. That's the ghetto all over.

Recollect his melancholy moments, his inability to mingle in the joy of those robust brutes at the bar; his Christmas Eve, the lonesome party, and the ballet of the bread-sticks on his fork tip—a poem, an intermezzo, after the manner of Heinrich Heine. Remember his way of shovelling snow—work which disgusted him, as all manual labor naturally disgusts the Jew. But necessity forces him. He finds a means of making it useless. The snow which he removes from before one door he piles up before another. At the end of his day nothing will have been accomplished, but he will have earned a few pen-

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nies. And, in the end, success. He did not discover the gold mine by which he profits. The pains of others serve him. To crown everything, and to finish this ghetto portrait, is the marvellous ease with which he accustoms himself to his great good fortune, just as he accepted his good luck. Very quickly he replaces with smartly tailored clothes the little round hat and his livery of misfortune. And yet, in just a detail about his toilet—in his frock coat and top hat—he keeps his roguishness, that miraculous roguishness, the roguishness of Aaron. . .

Among the strange trades practiced in the ghetto the queerest is certainly that of “son-in-law.” There are sons-in-law in all countries, but those out there are unique in this world.

The reading of pious books still is the favorite distraction in those communities of very ardent faith, where the village life still hovers about the Synagogue, and daily prayers, feasts, fasting and

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ritual ceremonies absorb a greater part of the time. For old men and sons-in-law this reading is the only occupation. A son-in-law is a former Talmudic student whom his father-in-law keeps gratuitously, without asking anything of him save that he study the sacred books and thus sanctify his house. "Sons-in-law" are rare to-day, and there is now less and less enthusiasm about supporting such a fellow: however distinguished he is, he costs a good deal and earns nothing. But barely thirty years ago, "sons-in-law" were in almost every home of fairly well-to-do Jews.

Now it happens that in these lost ghettos—impenetrable by outer ideas, one might have considered—modern tendencies have managed to filter in. And this has been accomplished precisely through the sons-in-law, those pious students who should have called down the benediction of heaven upon the ghetto.

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When, in one of the Yechibas, a few students were afflicted with the fatal desire to become initiated to profane studies, they passed the word among themselves and arranged to live in the same lodging house. There, by the light of a candle, they chanted late into the night, as if they were praying. But instead of reciting the ancient Talmudic text, which they knew by heart, they were reading Mendelssohn's Bible—to the rhythm of the Talmud, to avoid the curiosity of their hostess and of the night watchman. It was Mendelssohn's Bible which introduced them to German, grammars, manuals and Hebrew translations of foreign novels which were then first being published in Berlin and Vienna. The most celebrated of all, and the first to be translated into the sacred tongue, was *The Mysteries of Paris*, by Eugene Sue. One day original novels in Hebrew appeared and naturally met with tremendous success among the youth of the

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Yechibas. Their theme is eternally the same: the ghetto is put on the stand, and the rabbis are condemned, particularly the miraculous rabbis. Humanism, civilization—the “*haskata*,” as it is called in Hebrew—are lauded to the skies. It really is strange to find that the tongue of the Bible should reveal to the ghetto those thoughts that will destroy it. . . .

What nostalgic appeal could that *haskata* have had for those village intellectuals, nourished until then on the Talmud alone? Had they a clearer idea of the Divinity than the old readers of the Cabbala among whom they lived? For most of them the *haskata* meant cutting as close as possible the cork-screw curls that flapped about their cheeks; and slowly diminishing their ankle-length caftans until they were the size of a frock coat; and mixing into their Yiddish jargon as many German words as possible (which, by the way, made them resemble Rabelais' school-boy

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of Limoges, who larded his provincial *patois* with Greek and Latin). It only made them incomprehensible to their fellow believers.

These tormented intellectuals, whether in open or secret revolt against their surroundings, formed a type which until then was unknown in the ghetto. They called themselves Maskil (plural Maskilim) which means 'enlightened.' But popular jargon dubbed them otherwise, and called them Epicures, in memory of those accursed Greeks who—at the time they ruled Judea—had attempted to substitute Hellenism for Judiasm and Jupiter for Jehovah. Among people obstinately faithful to their antiquated ideas, these Maskelim, or Epicures, were misled sheep, traitors to God and Israel. The entire ghetto leagued together to make their lives impossible. They needed courage, those spirits who were so eager to enter more or less upon forbidden things. They were alone, without

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help from anyone, and there was always the threat of being denounced to the rabbi and driven from the Yechibas. And when one became a son-in-law, and his board and lodging were assured, what cunning one needed to deceive the observation of an entire family, who watched over one more sharply than any lodging house keeper or night watchman! A great many sons-in-law, secretly cultivating the haskatam and getting an idea of civilization via Eugene Sue, have been surprised by their fathers-in-law; and then have seen not only their rich calling of "gendre" swept away, and their wives taken from them (they would probably recover from this), but have brooded over the loss of their bed and board and the happy life spent in reading the Talmud and *The Mysteries of Paris*.

I met the son of a miraculous rabbi who had been married when fourteen years old to the daughter of one of his father's colleagues, him-

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self à miraculous rabbi. The bride was only twelve. These two children were very happy together. The bridegroom, in his rôle of son-in-law, lived at his father-in-law's expense. But one day the rabbi's secretary discovered a German grammar, a manual of natural history and an arithmetic at the bottom of his chest. There was a scene at the court of the miraculous rabbi. This young fellow who had seemed fit for miracles had been eating forbidden fruit. His father-in-law summoned him and gave him the choice between the daughter and the grammar, between submission and divorce. The girl-wife did not dream that her husband would sacrifice her for a grammar and an arithmetic. He, on the other hand, imagined that those two volumes held all the knowledge in the world, an unknown universe full of mysterious enchantment to which he held the key and into which he was about to penetrate, as into the Garden of Eden.

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Both of them wept copiously, but the young man went on his way. What can have become of that little girl who, weeping, once clutched the caftan of the husband whom a grammar swept away from her? And who can say that a knowledge of strange things brought him complete happiness? No one knows, but I feel certain that a great many just like him have not found happiness and in this disillusionment is the inner drama of the Maskilim life. Many of those intellectuals left the ghetto to live elsewhere—in Vienna, Munich, Berlin, London or Paris. And they quickly learned that the civilization which they had thought so brilliant, while sitting on the benches of the Yechiba or in the fathers-in-law's homes, had nothing to do with what they had imagined. In this new world everything hurt them: the foreigners who mistrusted or disdained them; and their own fellow believers, now too thoroughly adapted to occidental life, who

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had replaced the ghetto's traditional idealism by scepticism and coarse materialism. And even they did not seem to fit in anywhere.

"To-day," writes one of them, in a melancholy narrative of his life and efforts to attain a higher culture, "I have summed up that existence of thirty years and one month, and I see with despair a zero at the foot of the column. Fate has been unkind to me! I received an education contrary to everything I might have needed later. I was brought up to a rabbinistic celebrity, and here I am, a clerk! I was raised in an imaginary world to be a strict observer of the Law, and that education still weighs heavily upon me, even though the imaginary man has vanished from within me. I was trained to live in the shadow of death, and here I am hurled headlong among people living a most realistic life that I can not share. A world of dreams and pure theory "prepared" me, yet I am forced by a practical

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life to apply myself to it; but like a piece of paper scraped so thin that nothing more can be written upon it, my brain can not seem to replace the speculative with the practical. I weep over the little demolished world that I am no longer able to find."

In the eyes of these disillusioned Maskilim, Mendelssohn and his successors had served Israel poorly. They had been wrong in thinking that Judaism is a religious system like any other, and that once the Jew had observed its practices at home and in the synagogue, he might conform to the customs and thought of the people among whom he lived. No, Judaism was something else indeed—doubtless a religion, but above all a race, a thought, a feeling of life, a particular genius that one took with him beyond the home and the synagogue, and was not to be shaken off without penalty of self-destruction. This spirit of the Occident of which the

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Maskilim had hoped so much endangered Israel's spirit quite as much as the stupidity into which the rabbis and the obscurantists plunged the ghetto. And so, instead of forswearing oneself and making the great and useless effort to be like everyone else, one had to become more Jewish than ever. One had to rediscover in history and the Hebrew language the profound sources of Israel's inspiration; the consciousness of being a Jewish people and having a Jewish soul had to be renewed.

This was the argument of a few intellectuals assembled in a little review, *Haschahar* (*Dawn*), around a great Hebrew writer, the novelist Smolensky. His entire work is precisely the eternal story of the Maskil who, disgusted with the stupidity and hypocrisy of the ghetto, escapes from it. He sees the world, imagines that he has found the secret of his freedom in occidental thought, finally perceives his error, and knows

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that he will find himself only by returning to the profound sources of Israel's genius.

This effort of Smolensky and the contributors to *Dawn* was at first considered inopportune. The revolution of 1848 had just given the Jews equal civil and political rights in almost every European country. Even in Russia a liberal government—an unexpected fact in itself—favored the emancipation of the Jews. Czar Alexander II had just permitted them to live in certain cities, which until then had been forbidden them, and he had opened their way to the liberal professions. At such a moment was it reasonable to discredit and suspect occidental thought? Or to preach the return to a purely Jewish culture? But just when the subject was being passionately discussed in Maskilim circles, the wrath of heaven burst again upon Israel.

In 1882 Alexander was assassinated. A few Jewish socialists were in the plot, and their fel-

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low believers were made responsible for the crime. The police turned against the Jews the old and popular hatred. They organized massacres and blood flowed in the ghetto—something that had not happened in Russia for over two centuries, since the time of Chmielnicki. Was Israel's hope in civilization to end in a return of its darkest days? The dreams of Mendelssohn and his successors went up in smoke. The French Revolution, and especially the revolution of 1848, seemed at the time to have wiped out anti-Semitism. But not as completely as they appeared to. Henceforth it must be out of the question to mix with people who responded by massacres to the sympathy one poured out to them. . . So ran the popular opinion. Smolensky had foreseen the truth. Israel had decided to work out its own salvation. To the conception of a Jewish people reunited by an intellectual renaissance and by their ancestral

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language was added another ideal: they would re-establish a real country; on some given territory would be installed the Jews who, after two thousand years of exile, might again form a nation.

The idea was not new. With singular force it had already been voiced some twenty years before by a Jew whose name is almost forgotten to-day—Moses Hess, in his *Rome and Jerusalem*.

A Jew of the Rhine valley, he had received from his parents (tradespeople at Bonn) a strong religious education of the sort honored in Jewish families in the past. He had studied at a German university, had dropped all religious belief, and accordingly was on ill terms with his relations.

Later he became intimate with Karl Marx, adopted his social doctrine, left Germany and settled in Paris where he lived until his death. But it happened that this apostate returned to

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Judaism. Although a disciple of Marx and an unceasing socialist and internationalist, he conceived the idea of a Jewish nationalism. He reasoned in this fashion: for the best interests of humanity, each people, like each individual, should develop natural qualities to their maximum power. And if this applied to the most mediocre races, it is doubly true in the case of a people like Israel. Has any other served better the cause of civilization? Is the salvation of any race more important to the well being of all humanity? The Messiahship of the prophets has not yet borne all its fruits. Then it suffices to free it from all the religious nebulæ in which Ezekiel enshrouded it; it is enough to recover the true mission of Israel, to make peace and justice reign throughout the world. . . Thus Hess's nationalism was reconciled with Marx's internationalism to mould the Zionism of to-morrow.

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In the depths of their shadows, in their darkest hours, the people of Israel have never lost the hope awakened in them by the prophets: they would be the saviors of the world! Their prayers remind them of it four times a day. But in their far-flung exile and deep distress they consoled themselves by repeating that God has purposely dispersed the Jews among nations that they might fulfil their mission at all points of the globe.

A poor consolation, and unsatisfactory to Moses Hess. If, according to him, the destiny of the world was to be influenced and its old genius recovered, the Jewish people must group themselves, reconstitute a national unity and establish themselves in a country where they could again take up a natural life that had been suspended for centuries. And those Jews who would not leave their adopted countries for this new Judea would nevertheless feel the warmth

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and life of this reborn Jewish feeling.

In 1860 Hess's ideas seemed impossible. They appeared even less so in 1882, after the assassination of the Czar. A doctor from Odessa, one Leo Pinsker, took them up again in a pamphlet entitled *Auto-Emancipation*, celebrated for the concise energy of its expression.

"The Jew," he wrote, "is a dead man for the living; a foreigner to the natives; a beggar to the rich; an exploiter and a millionaire to the poor; a man without a country to patriots; an abhorred competitor to all classes of society. His home is a foreign land; his unity is dispersion; his solidarity is general hostility; his weapon is humility; his tactics are flight; his originality is adaptation; his future is . . . the next day. . ." And Pinsker arrived at the conclusion of Moses Hess: that, truly, the Jews formed a heterogeneous element among the people with whom they dwell: an element incapable

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of assimilation by other nations; and, on the other hand, incapable of being tolerated by them. Then there was nothing left for them to do but leave, relieving the nations of their unwelcome presence, liberating themselves and reorganizing on some selected spot the nucleus of a national renaissance.

And where would this Jewish hearth be? Pinsker was not very precise on this subject, but all the tradition of Israel replied, "Israel!"

Enthused by the idea of returning to the soil of their ancestors, a few Jewish students abandoned Russia and left for the Palestine.

But by setting themselves up most precariously in a country where their future was no surer than in Russia, these unfortunate Lovers of Zion, as they were called, did not touch upon Pinsker's dream. Their movement was of merely symbolic and sentimental value. This impotent gesture of idealism, the purest nega-

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tion of Mendelssohn's dreams, concluded the outburst which had swept so many ghetto intellectuals toward occidental civilization. It had been a century of catastrophes.

IX

THE NEW MESSIAHISM



“We travel, but alas, no one awaits us.”

—*Rosenfeld*

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II DEALISM triumphed. The new Messiahism, the hope of a Jewish hearth, stirred conscience-deep by Moses Hess and Pinsker, had launched the fanatical Lovers of Zion toward Jerusalem and had gone on to become a reality of to-day. And by a strange coincidence, this return of Israel to its native soil resulted from one of those sturdy upheavals in which the prophets were pleased to imagine the coming of the Messiah.

For several years Pinsker's ideas lay dormant, as ideas in books have a habit of doing: bibliographical curiosities, the tiny flame that spurts up of an evening in the room of a solitary scholar,

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lights his window through the night, and vanishes with the dawn. It is even said that Hess's book and Pinsker's pamphlet were completely unknown to the man who later was to animate their thoughts and bring to life their dying reveries. It is true that ideas often hew out strange paths. One need not read them to become imbued by them—they appear to hang in the air that nourishes the spirit, explaining why men's minds and faces may resemble each other at one time. Then, too, similar circumstances, impressing certain brains, awaken in them the same ideas.

Doctor Theodore Herzl was a type of assimilated Jew, or at least he thought he was.¹ At the end of the last century he had left Vienna to live in Paris, which then was the place where a Jew could live more agreeably than anywhere else. Outside, a certain limited circle, Drumont

¹ The reader who is interested in Zionism will find it more amply set forth in our *Next Year at Jerusalem*.

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and his paper, *La Libre Parole*, were having little success. In the optimistic atmosphere of the moment, anti-Semitism seemed the archaic and antedated doctrine of another age. Personally, I do not recall that at St. Barbe and Louis-le-Grant, where I was then a student, I ever thought of distinguishing between my Christian and Jewish classmates.

Dr. Herzl, Paris correspondent of the Vienna *New Free Press*, frequented literary, political and journalistic circles. In 1894, when writing a review for his paper of Dumas's play, "*La Femme de Claude*," in which a Jew has important lines about the return of Jews to their ancestral territory, he reported, "The good Jew Daniel wished to find his long lost country and reunite his wandering brothers. But to be quite frank, any such Jew ought to know that it would hardly be rendering a service to his race to give them back their historic patrimony. And if the

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Jews were really to return there, the very next morning they would perceive that they have not very much in common with each other. For centuries they have taken root in new countries, have become denationalized and differentiated; and the little resemblance which still distinguishes them is merely due to the oppression to which they have everywhere been obliged to submit."

A year later the Dreyfus Case burst upon the world. To Herzl, in his own words, it was like a blow on the head. It seemed to him that, until that moment, he had never realized he was a Jew. Anti-Jewish feeling seemed suddenly to have seized three quarters of France. Just one hundred years after the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the veil in the Temple was rent asunder to disclose a reality unknown until then. Or perhaps people had merely refused to see it. Herzl was terrified by the violence of the phe-

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nomenon. He said to himself, "When a people so highly civilized can arrive at this, what about peoples who, at present, have not yet attained the levels reached by France a hundred years ago?"

And as in 1881, during the Russian pogroms, Pinsker had written his *Auto-Emancipation*, Herzl now wrote a pamphlet closely resembling in form and detail the essay by the doctor from Odessa. They are so alike, indeed, that one is surprised to find that Herzl was not acquainted with that work.

But Dr. Herzl had a gift that Pinsker lacked. When it became necessary to proceed from theory to action, Pinsker had no method. He had been content to do his best for the Lovers of Zion, who were vegetating out there in their miserable colonies; and he had arranged the departure of a few other unfortunates toward Palestine. But Herzl was full of disdain for this hopeless colonization, whose defeat could only

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injure his own plans—that is, it discouraged in advance all whom the venture might tempt. There could be no colonization and no exodus until the ground had been prepared and the principles of a state created. And all the rest of his life he devoted his talents as an orator, writer and politician, as well as his great personal charm, to a project that would change dreams into realities.

Like Pinsker, he wondered where this fatherland should be. The reply was eternally the same: for a Jew there can be no native land save Palestine. But Palestine belonged to the Turks. Herzl left no stone unturned to bring it back to Israel. He interviewed the Pope, the Sultan and the Kaiser. He tried to interest every chancery of Europe and all high financial circles. It was all in vain. He failed everywhere. The financiers were noncommittal; they had no

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faith in his project. Baron Edmond de Rothschild had quite enough to do in maintaining—in spite of his family, who treated him as a dreamer—those unhappy Palestine colonies founded by the Lovers of Zion, who without him would have perished. Baron de Hirsch did not believe in the mystic virtues of Palestine's soil. He preferred a more modest and easily accomplished undertaking rather than Herzl's ambitious plans. To farms that he had organized in the Argentine he sent groups of wandering Jews and thought that out there they would find a better soil than the pebbles of Palestine; and where, above all, they would not be crushed by the burden of their heavy past. . .

The Pope was amiable; the Kaiser was polite. Every chancery in Europe had dusty pigeon-holes waiting for just such projects as Dr. Herzl's. As for the Sultan, when he heard this strange

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visitor demand an entire province of his Empire, he merely offered him a stickpin in remembrance of his singular story.

But Herzl was not to be discouraged. If Judea was inaccessible, then Israel must be sheltered elsewhere. The English offered Uganda, but Herzl was the only one ready to move out there. All his partisans abandoned him. What would become of them, they asked, way out in Uganda? How would the Jews get along with the Negroes? No one seemed ready to follow him. He had endured one defeat after another. He was tired, ill, and, perhaps, despondent. He had incited both enthusiasm and deception. And then he died at the very prime of life, without having obtained his end.

That is not exactly correct. If he had not succeeded in interesting the European powers in his enterprise, he had deeply impressed the masses of his fellow believers. Through the

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newspapers, by his books and at the congress he called together—a sort of parliament of Israel—he ended by creating an ideal Mother Country in the Jewish imagination; a country to which the spirit might journey before the body.

He had lived so intensely for his idea that it had become part of his life, had borrowed something human from him. But time and the dimming memory of his personality might have effaced even that if quite unforeseen events had not brought to life what hitherto had been only an aspiration, a desire, a floating idea. For how, in truth, could one have foreseen that only a world-shaking catastrophe could create a Jewish State?

The defense of the small, oppressed nations was part of the Allies' program. Dr. Herzl's disciples at once seized the opportunity. Had not the Jewish nation been oppressed for over two thousand years? It might have been called

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the dean of ill-treated nations; and what other people had loved a lost country so long?

These complaints were echoed particularly in England where, as among the Jews, the Bible is a spiritual foundation. Besides this sentimental fact was the strategical point that by installing a Jewish Fatherland in Palestine, under her high protection, England saw two advantages: she could remove France from a country where, since Charlemagne, France had guarded the Holy Land, and won great prestige in the Near East; and then England hoped for a kind of fortress out there which would protect the Suez Canal and the route to India.

Even before the war ended, Balfour's declaration proclaimed that Palestine was to become the national home of the Jews, under British protection—that is to say, a place of refuge, a shelter with all civil rights, and not a state with merely the privileges of a political government. This

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was not quite what had been hoped. Back in the land of their ancestors, the Jews would still be strangers: Israel, whose financiers, journalists and politicians were, openly or secretly, everywhere influential in world affairs, would still be treated in its own country like a minor people, incapable of self-government. But the wiser understood that these regrets were ill-timed. Without the British forces, what would have become of the new arrivals, lost among seven or eight hundred thousand Arabs who considered them only intruders?

Therefore, renouncing all superfluous claims for the moment, the Zionists directed every effort toward the spiritual and material conquest of the country.

X

THE RETURN TO JERUSALEM



“Our hope shall not die,
Zion, Zion, land given to our forbears,
Our hope of return, our hope of seeing
 anew,
Our hope of two thousand years.”

—*The Zionist National Anthem*

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BALFOUR'S declaration recognized the right of the Jews to settle freely in Palestine, but without despoiling the actual proprietors of their land. Ready money had to be paid for their ancestral soil before it could be occupied. And this was indeed a stumbling block, since most of the emigrants were absolutely without resources; and, unlike ordinary colonists, they could count on no government to back them up. So exceptional a case demanded new expedients.

The colonization of Palestine is founded upon a Biblical principle diametrically opposed to our Roman law, which is that individual property is

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absolute and perpetual. To this conception the Zionists oppose this principle from the Book of Leviticus: God said, "The soil shall not be sold for perpetuity, for the soil belongs to me."

God? I suspect that the pioneers of Zion have ceased to believe in Him. But they replace Jehovah with the person of the Jewish people, and in their new Law the Old Testament phrase is: " 'The soil shall not be sold for perpetuity, for the soil is mine,' say the people of Israel."

A National Fund, nourished by world-wide contributions from Jews, buys back the sacred soil piece by piece; and this National Fund—donated by the Jewish people—remains the owner of the ground. The Palestinian colonist is merely the farmer of Israel. If he has any personal resources, he need not sink them immediately into the purchase of a site, but may spend them in exploiting his property. If he has nothing, he may work as an agricultural employee in

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a colony. And as before, in Israel's ancient Law, the Jew could not be a perpetual slave (he might regain his liberty every seven years), so the new Jewish code saved the agricultural proletarian from a continually precarious position. Obligatory profit-sharing will some day raise him from the laborer's condition to that of a farmer.

On a recent trip I visited those colonies. One can not deny their variety, ingenuity and daring. Each is organized in a different fashion, comprising the most diverse systems of coöperation and even absolute communism. But theory is one thing and practice another. The Zionist publications have openly reproached me for not painting an idyllic picture of the life led out there. I told what I saw without the slightest disparaging intention. I have no prejudice whatever against this Zionistic enterprise. It is a great imaginative and poetic work, the climax

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of a long effort, and it is a signal moment in Jewish history. But a mere passer-by may certainly raise a dispassionate voice amid the uproar of a literary propaganda that is dominated by false sentimentality, oriental exaggeration and misplaced vanity. It is propaganda which, instead of ennobling an already noble enterprise, endangers it by abuse and deceit. Is it belittling a thing to show its difficulties? One can not overlook the immense difficulties that Israel is encountering on the soil of its ancestors.

The first and the most evident to a newcomer in Palestine is the misery of the country. There is little good soil between swampy and unhealthy valleys and rocky promontories. Stones must be built into terraces, as in the old times, to retain earth for mulberries, olives and grapes. Few trees; little water; desert lands. . . It is, in short, a country little favored by heaven. Human patience once drew something from it,

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but centuries of idleness have destroyed it, and its rejuvenation demands enormous effort.

Many strong, healthy peasants, used to hard labor in an unfriendly climate, are required for this thankless task. Will the Jews some day be such a race in Palestine? Or must they employ the native population, *en masse*, to till their soil? The latter happens most often in any colony, no matter where it is. It is occurring right now in the colonies founded by the Lovers of Zion, and it is about to take place, save in a few districts, in the new Zionist colonies. But under such circumstances, Israel will be only the director of an enterprise, the chief of an exploitation. The population will remain largely what it is to-day: Arabian. . . And the Zionists will have failed in their dearest desire, the rebirth of the race by the touch of the soil.

Another difficulty is money. No newly founded colony ever failed to swallow up enor-

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mous capital. The French know what Algeria, Tonkin and Morocco cost before they brought returns. But as the Jews are not a recognized state, resources for colonizing Palestine depended upon individuals. To find them was no easy task and excused, in some measure, the very emphatic tone of Zionist propaganda. Perpetual demands are as inevitable as enthusiasm and generosity are necessary. The Jewish masses are miserable, so the same doors are always visited, and finally even the most generous become tired of giving.

One must remember also the fact that a new national Judaism was far from rallying everyone to its cause. In America, where only yesterday a heavy emigration maintained the profound sentiments of religion, the idea of Zionism was welcomed enthusiastically—particularly in New York, whose two million Jews make it the true capital of Israel and furnish almost all the money

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for the National Fund. But in Occidental Europe—Germany, England, France and Italy—the Palestine idea was not received so well, since the Jews have been long acclimated.

Moulded by European training, the Jews there have entirely followed Mendelssohn's way of thinking. They go even farther than their master, since most of them have abandoned the practice of their religion. They consider that Theodore Herzl greatly exaggerated the anti-Semitic feeling afloat in the air around them. That powerless hostility may sometimes be socially disagreeable, but it does not interfere at all with their affairs or thought. Isn't Zionism threatening to rekindle hatreds which little by little were dying out? Isn't it dangerous to assert aggressively that the Jews are a people apart, unable to assimilate with any other? Doesn't this corroborate the anti-Semitic theorists who have never held any other idea?

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“If,” they go on to ask, “Zionism were to enrich Jewish activity and Jewish thought, all very well. But what good can come from this artificial return to an individual culture at a time when all forms of civilization are tending toward unity? And what culture can be developed in that oriental climate which has produced nothing interesting for twenty centuries? Will Jewish intelligence work a miracle out there? Isn’t it risking, rather, a parched and shrivelled death under the blazing sun? Surely to exile this mental force is an error. Its destiny is linked henceforth with occidental thought. In the European concert of civilization it is an instrument that holds its own. It would have nothing to gain by playing a solo out there on the plateau of Jerusalem.”

And the Jewish anti-Zionists further affirm that emigration to Palestine is in no way—and

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never will be—a total, definitive solution of the Jewish question as had once been hoped. Who does not recall Clemenceau's memorable sally at the Peace Conference?—"Can Palestine hold fifteen million Jews? No! Then your Zionism does not interest me."

There is a lot of truth in that. A few hundred thousand Jews out there will not settle the Jewish question for the millions of others who live on in Russia and elsewhere. Judea is a small country, and even with the best apportionment it could not possibly shelter all the Jews. Moreover, millions of Jews have not the slightest desire to go there. Even those favoring the return to ancestral soil do so in a purely idealistic way which now and then is manifested by a newspaper article or an act of generosity. But they themselves remain comfortably where they happened to be born; and that, in a way, justifies

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that rather amusing definition of Zionism: "A Zionist is a Jew who wishes to send another Jew out to Palestine."

Without taking sides in the pro- and anti-Zionist controversy, I note that since Herzl a new event has greatly changed the entire aspect of the problem. Emigration to Palestine especially interested the Jewish masses in Russia and Roumania, the only countries where the Jews were really to be pitied. Their situation in Roumania has not greatly been modified, and the National Home is still a last resort. But in Russia the revolution changed everything for them. I do not mean to say that the Jews in Soviet Russia are particularly happy. No one, I believe, is happy in Russia. But amid that immense misfortune the Jews share the common destiny. They no longer live, as before, under laws of exception; they are no longer relegated to a certain limited territory; they may

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go where they please, and enter the professions of their choice. Already, in the new Russian state, their intelligence and activity have brought privileged places to many of them. And those who at present are not exactly rejoicing may always hope for the morrow. Distant and miserable Palestine no longer seems the Paradise where all their woes might end. The principles of Soviet communism are joyfully recognized by many as the ancient calls of their prophets, the state of perfect justice and equality which is the reign of the Messiah. And they seem perfectly willing to replace their legendary Messiahship by the Third-International.

Nevertheless, it is just possible that Theodore Herzl saw clearly, that his vision was greater than one would have thought. What will happen in Russia? If a reaction were to occur to-morrow amid those mysterious and barbaric masses, what would become of the Jews? . .

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They would welcome—then—the ancient soil in which to-day they have apparently lost interest.

How will Palestine's difficulties be settled? Not being a Jew, I do not wish to play the prophet. From what I saw out there, it would be difficult to speak of success, and even more so of failure. It is always unkind to discuss coldly a movement into which so much enthusiasm and generosity have certainly entered.

The other day I heard a story which impressed me greatly. If you have seen an American or rather a Jewish film entitled "The Ten Commandments," you will remember a scene depicting the crossing of the Red Sea. For purposes of realism, great numbers of Jews from the New York ghetto were brought to Los Angeles. At the moment when this immense crowd, some on foot and some in chariots, was about to launch into the sea, the film director—a Jew—rushed

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on to the platform and shouted to the quivering crowd, "Jews, you are about to show the world one of the greatest scenes in our national history. Cast yourself into the sea which opens before you. A hundred dollars to the fellow who wrecks his chariot!"

The Zionists of Jerusalem are once again about to cast themselves into the sea. We strangers on the banks can only watch them drive their chariots. . .

But from now on the Zionists, from a spiritual point of view, have achieved a great success. They have created, or rather have revived that living bond indispensable to a people—a national tongue. That tongue is Hebrew.

Until a few years ago, Hebrew, like Greek and Latin, was a dead language. The sacred tongue of the Bible and the Talmud. All Jews could read its letters, since they must pray in Hebrew; but few understood what they read, and those

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who did never used that antiquated tongue in everyday talk. Yiddish was the ordinary language in Russia, Poland and Roumania. But even though the ghetto had a strong Yiddish literature, Yiddish is less a language than a patois, and not all Jews are acquainted with it. But Hebrew, abandoned for centuries, is a great classical language. In it Israel manifested its genius, and it has the virtues of a long tradition. It was naturally preferable to the jargon. New words expressing new things have enlivened it, for in the two thousand years of its silence (in the time of Jesus it was already abandoned) mankind has evolved many things for which Moses's archaic tongue had no name. The language has been refreshed, rejuvenated, made up to date. And here is a great result, the first obtained by the Zionists: the Hebrew language has been resuscitated, has again become a living tongue. In all the schools of Palestine every-

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thing is taught in Hebrew—science, literature, philosophy and history. Every Jewish child in Judea now speaks the language of Moses as his mother tongue. And when one stops to think that this has been accomplished in ten years, one can only admire the effort.

To crown this great spiritual attainment, the Zionists in 1924 opened a Hebrew University on the Mount of Olives. If I am not mistaken, this is the undertaking they cherish most. They seem to have no doubt that on this spot, where Israel's genius once flowered, they will find their former inspiration in a tongue spoken by the prophets and in a place sheltered from foreign influences. They are certain that some day their University will send out spirits capable of guiding humanity toward new paths as they did in other days. There is a question: what is this spirit of Israel that is to reflower out there?

It is the prophetic spirit, the call to justice

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and perfect equality that aroused Ezekiel. From this have come two movements that seem contradictory: internationalism, as Moscow understands it, and which owes much to Israel; and Palestine's nationalism.

However, both movements are really united in a brotherhood of thought, are bound together in one common conception, the most deeply founded in Israel: that the Jewish race is the chosen race, charged with leading humanity to better goals. Through it we have come to know the Old and New Testament, and it reserves a third revelation for to-morrow. And this revelation is being prepared in Palestine and Russia. By destroying the former Russian social order, the communists at Moscow think they have furthered the interests of all humanity. In restoring the ancient Biblical spirit to Judea, the Zionists at Jerusalem also feel that they have worked not only for themselves, but for the world, since

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they are about to bring us what is apparently indispensable to our salvation: the flower of Israel's spirit, languishing until now in the ghettos, but at last about to recover all its brilliancy and former vigor in the ancient soil.

The other day, in Jerusalem, a little watch-maker in the Rue de Jaffa said to a friend of mine, "How is it possible not to be happy here? This is the capital of the globe."

An astonishing statement, expressing naïve and magnificent hope. And with his faculty of enthusiasm, and with his racial promptness for divining the future, this young watch-maker believes that it is already so!

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“A peaceful, quiet, flat, smug Judaism?
Why, that is death!”

—*Andrew Spire*

XI

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ARE Bolshevism and Zionism the only alternatives open to the Jewish mind? Has it been proved that Israel's ardor for justice and equality (its pride since the days of the prophets) may exist in no form other than religion? May not the Jewish intelligence (the only thing, as the Pope said to Mr. Sokolov, which has not been denied the Jews) be employed otherwise than in the function of a national or social Messiahism? Between Lenine and Herzl, is there no place for another kind of Jew? And, furthermore, is not that place already occupied?

The occidental Jews left the ghetto not so

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long ago, and in France and England, if one considers the question from a social and mundane point of view, they seem hardly to have left it. In Germany they are still within their confines. Nevertheless, here in the Occident, we find them already holding eminent places in the intellectual order—the only one that counts. And the places they hold seem more eminent because they are out of proportion to the Jewish population. In glancing over the list of the Nobel Prize winners, you will no doubt be surprised that Jewish laureates are more numerous than those of any other nationality. Can it be said that those Jews who have been settled among us for several generations, who have but a vague idea of their ancestral customs and have largely renounced their religious practices, are no longer Jews—and no longer concern this little history? Or, on the other hand, shall one still consider them Jews? If so, one must grant that in the

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Jewish intelligence there are forms other than those encouraging Bolshevism or Zionism.

This latter point of view seems to me the true one. All Israel's preoccupations are obviously not turned toward Jerusalem or Moscow. It is equally evident that however detached from his ancestral center and the Synagogue, a Jew is always a Jew. Personally, I consider it insulting to him and to his race to call him by any other name. On this point Mendelssohn's school was long in error. They imagined for some time that the more they engaged in occidental life, the more their ethnical traits became effaced; and they made every effort to delete from their lives, habits, and even their persons, anything recalling those traits. It was a narrow and ungrateful sentiment toward their own, and it did not make them happy. This renouncement appeared all the more despicable since it came at a time when all races were hotly

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vindicating the honor of being themselves, and the right to live their own personal lives. But Jewish morality has altered greatly in the past few years.

The change could be felt before the war, and it has ever since been developing. Abandoning his attitude of humility, the assimilated Jew—without denying the benefits of the occidental culture to which he contributes—contends to-day for his intrinsic quality as a Jew. He recognizes that he is a Jew, and proclaims it. He need not be a Zionist to do this. He may even be an anti-Zionist, for reasons already explained; he may become a good citizen of the country he inhabits, and even be an excellent patriot, as he was during the war. And yet all his heart and soul may be in the race from which he springs. Zionism is only the extreme expression of Jewish sentiment, retrieved by those intellectuals who so long disdained it. But out-

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side of Zionism, this same sentiment is manifested in the most various forms: religious revival, literary and artistic activity of purely Hebraic inspiration, and new forms of social conduct. And in all this there is perhaps an excess which, unless they are careful, might become almost as unpleasant as their one-time humility. The Jews themselves feel this.

“We, the French Jews,” very justly writes my friend Spire, who shared brilliantly in the revival of Israel’s literature, “we are not a little annoyed by the profusion of public manifestations such as novels, plays, films, posters and reunions by the ever growing multiplicity of Jewish restaurants, pastry shops, bakeries, etc. If this annoys us, how much more must it annoy those who are not Jews.”

Admittedly the people of Israel are in a difficult position. If they renounce their faith, they are reproached. If they cling to it, they are

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reproached. This doubtless is because the race lacks intellectual moderation, and possesses oriental excess. No matter how appealing this new Jewish mentality, does it not risk provoking a deeper opposition between Jews and Christians than ever existed before? Many Jews fear it. One hopes that they may be mistaken, and that Israel may find at last the balance it has always lacked.

In the meantime, one fact remains. Whether proudly or timidly he proclaims himself a Jew, the son of Mendelssohn feels that he is not sharing the same atmosphere as those around him, and he suffers according to his sensitivity. And why this isolation? A difference in religion can hardly explain it, since both Christians and Jews are now equally detached from their respective beliefs. Nor do economic competition and opposing interests offer sufficient reasons. The reasons exist, but in themselves do not justify a

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certain feeling in all classes of society, a sentiment which creates about the Hebrew an indefinable something that so often makes him regret—or at least become bored by—being a Jew. Prejudice, atavism, misinterpretation of ideas—each plays a part, too. But there is still something else. There is the Jewish character itself. In it are natural defects, more or less known to everyone, and the Jews are the first to admit them; faults about which they joke so readily among themselves, ironically and with a kind of pleasure, a self-revenge. They know very well that a world fashioned in their image would be disagreeable, and that they would be the first to refuse to live in such a place.

“Jerusalem?” one of them once said to me, “Jerusalem? I wish to heaven all the Jews would move out there! We would be so glad to get rid of them!”

They are faults inborn in the race, or effected

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by circumstances under which they have lived, but whatever their origin, will they finally diminish and then disappear?

The story of the centuries might make one a bit sceptical, but it would be neither reasonable, nor generous nor just to turn distrustfully from the future.

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